

THE FOLIO

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AND EXPERIENTIAL THERAPY

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FELT MEANING AND GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION

How Focusing Brings New Patterns Of Relating In A Landscape Of Fear

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Revised Edition

FELT MEANING AND GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION: How Focusing Brings New Patterns of Relating in a Landscape of Fear

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INFORMATION

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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.

FOCUSING AND THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS: An Overview of Volume 20, #1

James R. Iberg, Ph.D.

First, on behalf of the editorial committee, I wish to thank the authors for writing to share their experiences with the larger community. Publishing articles is one of the ways we share Focusing with others, and this collection is full of interesting accounts of how Focusing is used when fear is a factor.

In looking over the whole issue, I took a particular perspective that is of interest to me to see how the contributions bear on that subject. Readers may wish to read the articles *before* reading what I write below, to take in the content freshly, rather than first looking at them through my lens.

I hope to make a strong case that Focusing fosters a kind of thinking about oneself and others that demonstrates considerable advance beyond a common way of thinking — the common way has some considerable disadvantages.

There is a problematic tendency that people have to think in polarized categories, such as “good guys” and “bad guys,” or “friend” and “foe,” or “allies” and “enemies.” This tendency is especially prevalent when people feel threatened. The consequences have been, and continue to be horrendous for modern society: the holocaust, genocides, internment of citizens of a particular ancestry or religion, lynchings, and more. We see contemporary examples of this kind of thinking in the language of politicians and the media when they speak of “terrorists” and an “axis of evil.” This kind of thinking is also operating when neighbors, formerly comfortable and friendly with each other, regress to viewing the same people as good or bad based only on their religious sect.

But it’s not only “those politicians and media types and other dumb people” who do this. When you start to think like that, *you’re doing it!* It tends to happen to *all of us*. Even we Focusers have this tendency.

Let me give you an example from the 2006 Weeklong Certification Workshop: I had prepared to do a group presentation on polarized thinking, but when the time came, we were behind schedule. I had a tense feeling about that, and something in me said “you can drop your presentation to save time, since you are saying something pretty obvious and trivial.” Fortunately, I was able to notice this in a Focusing way, did not let it dictate my behavior, and proceeded ahead with my planned presentation.

Reviewing my notes from the day, I wrote down some of what people reported after the guided exercise on polarization. A short summary:

- One man said the exercise heightened his awareness of stereotypes when a “military interrogator” on a plane asked to borrow his cell phone.

- A woman from Israel shared that she had recognized her tendency to polarize many situations into “everyone else” and her. Becoming aware of this shifted her feelings into being part of the group, rather than an outsider.

- A woman from South America shared that she identified her tendency to get very shy in new situations, thinking she was the only one feeling that way. Through the exercise and sharing, she realized (with relief) that there were many people who felt similar things.

Participants discovered this kind of polarized thinking goes on implicitly, in ways that could easily go unnoticed without the supportive conditions of Focusing. And I discovered that with all my years of Focusing, I too almost fell victim to polarized thinking, about myself and about what I had to offer.

I believe the contribution that Focusing makes on this pervasive problem has evolutionary significance. Why do I consider it *that* significant? Polarized thinking is likely to be maintained in part due to evolutionary pressures related to survival of species. There are times (and more so earlier in human history) when survival is more likely if one can quickly and easily recognize others from the same “tribe”. Those not in your tribe may be competing with you for resources or dominance, aligning with others in their tribe for strength. Safety is then to be found by joining with others like you.

At least since the first astronauts viewed the planet as a whole, awareness has been dawning that we are, in very meaningful ways, one tribe. For so long, we’ve used differentiating features to form opposing camps. This strategy does not appear to be in our long-term interest in light of the essential interdependence of all life forms on earth. Concern about global warming also compels us to think and act for the benefit of the whole world as one community of life.

Practically, it remains true that there are situations where we need the self-protective value of being able to quickly mobilize against an imminent threat to our safety. But most of the time the tendency to polarize has very large disadvantages, such as in personal relationships, and in negotiations where the goal is peaceful resolution of differences. The tendency to think in polarized categories creeps in when conflicts arise *within* one’s tribe, where survival is not threatened, but once thinking this way, we can feel as if it is! A nasty vicious circle can ensue: putting someone into a polarized category will often generate defensiveness. Just as any category leaves out much of the subtle detail of the individual who instances the category, polarized categories do this but with an additional, sometimes malicious twist: they tend to filter the individual details in a biased way that emphasizes negative features, and exaggerates undesirable features in the other. Naturally an individual so categorized feels poorly understood, if not totally misunderstood. A person feeling misunderstood will often act in ways that are unfriendly because of hurt and anger. Thus, treating someone as if they are your polarized category can produce behavior that “proves” the polarized thinking was justified.

The polarized thinker may not notice that the *way of thinking* helped cause the unfriendly behavior. Polarized thinking is an instance of a spot, as Gendlin says in his arti-

cle in this Folio, where we need to escape the given categories and think up (with TAE!) some better ones.

Focusing is a way of relating to oneself that carefully attends to subtleties and the details of personal intricacy. Many of us have experienced personally that Focusing opens us up to fresh and more empathic ways of perceiving ourselves and others. Thus, Focusing can generate alternatives to polarized thinking.

The articles here comprise diverse applications of Focusing to experiences involving “fear”. We can see this as a kind of sampling of the effects of Focusing. In situations where we feel fear and hence feel threatened, polarized thinking is especially likely to happen. Does Focusing actually generate alternatives to polarized thinking consistently and reliably in these situations? Let’s turn to the present evidence.

In the following pages, I have considered the authors’ writings selectively with emphasis on how the articles bear on polarized thinking — there is much more for you to gain from the articles than what I highlight here. So please know that my comments on the articles do not fully capture their richness. I hope the authors will forgive me if my comments fail to emphasize what they feel were their main points. For the readers, I hope that my comments increase your appetite to read the authors’ own words in their entirety.

Rob Foxcroft grapples with the philosophical dilemma of how one can balance ethical obligation with the demands of personal need and comfort. In part, he’s addressing the tendency to think *either* I’m ethical, *or* I’m selfish. Thinking carefully *with* and *about* Focusing, he concludes that our beloved practice of Focusing-and-listening enables us to *both* take care of our individual needs, *and* act in ways that care for others deeply and responsibly. This means we can be happy individuals that have constructive impacts on the world, freed from having to choose between a) feeling guilty that we don’t do enough or b) sacrificing personal health and satisfaction for service. To me, the rest of the articles demonstrate this, with many examples of Focusers thriving personally and simultaneously making constructive and ethical contributions to others.

The Focusers you read about in this issue provide examples of three different loci for the benefits of getting beyond polarized categories: 1) the individual’s experience of him/herself, 2) the individual’s perceptions of and behavior towards others, and 3) our vision of the political options and possibilities.

THE INDIVIDUAL’S EXPERIENCE OF SELF CHANGES TOWARD FREEDOM, EMPOWERMENT, AND BELONGING

Juan Prado Flores tells of a woman who started in a condition of being immobilized by her leftover feelings from losing a sister, unable to stand even being near a hospital, and unable to comfortably bathe her child. Focusing changed and enabled her to be present in the hospital with a very ill friend in a healing way, not to mention enjoying and delighting in bathing her child. In the end, the sorrow that she formerly feared opened her up to recovering treasured positive memories of her sister.

For decades Lucy Bowers lived with pride attached to her self-definition as “Canadian.” She reports with surprise and delight how liberating — almost ecstatic — it was for her, through Focusing in community, to expand her sense of self beyond that self-definition, to being Canadian *and* Dutch and *more*.

Lucy also gives examples of school children changed by Focusing, from being troubled and behaviorally difficult, to having more positive feelings, being less scattered in their attention, and experiencing conflicts with other students less often.

Bart Santen describes his “body-mapping” way of facilitating Focusing with young people who had experienced dissociation from early trauma. One of these cases demonstrates change, from being a fearful victim with some of his inner experience censored and walled off, to being a person who knew what happened to him, and who could choose whether or not to disclose the facts.

Rob Parker shares the story of an adolescent young man who had long been trapped in a pattern of feeling abused and mistreated, out of which he acted aggressively and defensively. After Focusing, he was able to much better control his aggressive impulses, and own up to his mistakes. He then actively began choosing honesty over denial and misrepresentation of the facts.

Joyce Kornblatt reports writers moving from thinking “I don’t have what it takes” to actively writing, and clearly having what it takes.

Mia Leijssen reports a client’s transformation through Focusing from a person fearful of a horrible past experience, whose mother had not been available to comfort her when she needed it, to a person who was able to provide comfort to her own hurting inner child. Focusing helped free the woman from repetitious intrusive experiences of the awful past, and allowed her to enjoy her life in the present with her family.

Akiko Doi shares her personal experience of moving from a condition of being “unable to look” because of her fearful feelings, to finding inner safety that allowed her to look in a prayerful way at things she had been unable to previously observe. From this experience she reports being encouraged that she can deal with scared parts of herself in more comfortable and productive ways.

Joan Klagsbrun lets us in on a woman’s transformation from being a rushed, dizzy, helpless patient, to a decision-maker with real influence over her course of treatment.

PEOPLE ESCAPE STEREOTYPES OF OTHERS

Through eventually successful Focusing, Edgardo Riveros moved from having his “American family” identified with the objectionable actions of the U.S. government, to experiencing them as people who cared both about him, and the injustices that occurred in Chile.

Josine van Noord started with a very visceral discomfort attached to her stereotyped impression of “the Japanese.” She could hardly stay in the same room with a Japanese person. They were to be hated and avoided, according to her previous conditioning. Her dra-

matic change through Focusing experiences opened her to being able to encounter individual persons who happened to be Japanese — and experience their kindness and many other positive qualities.

Although the stereotypes for her situation were actually those imposed by others on her group members, Jacqueline Wislesky reports how combining Focusing with Drama in her community group resulted in higher self-esteem and more positive self-concepts, perhaps enabling them to break free of the limitations of others' assumptions.

Nina Joy Lawrence reported a change in what “the other” expects — no, demands — for her to be accepted. Previously she felt she *had* to help people in order to be needed. Through Focusing she examined the detailed facts of her own experiences, and consequently her trust has grown that she and others are moved to help others in need — naturally. She now gives from a freer place, with less fear of being abandoned.

PEOPLE GET ENCOURAGED AND ENERGIZED POLITICALLY BY HOPEFUL AND MORE COOPERATIVE VISIONS

Agnes Rodríguez and Edgardo Riveros both found Focusing taking them to more positive visions of what could happen in their Latin American home countries in response to past injustices and losses. They find great hope in the potential of Focusing and Listening to enable individuals to make changes in their communities in powerful but peaceful ways. This could lead to important alternatives to the polarized conflict of “Oppressor” *versus* “Revolutionary.”

Nina Joy Lawrence and Pat Omidian give examples from their work in Afghanistan with both individual and political impact. They tell of a man who had a history of frequent arguments over the use of irrigation water. With Focusing, he discovered his ability to stop and pay attention to his feelings, rather than escalating conflict. He was so pleased with these individual results that he helped his village to set up Focusing sessions so others could similarly benefit.

CATEGORIES MISS THINGS

The examples I've chosen for each of my three categories don't just fit neatly where I've put them. Many of them bear on the other categories, too. As Gendlin tells us, categories are like that, as the real things are richer and more complicated and interconnected. For example, Catherine Hudek's study showing that Clearing a Space helps therapists avoid vicarious traumatization is another benefit of focusing, not quite fitting my categories. This is also true for Mical Sikkema's interesting description of how her blending of Focusing, Zen, and working in a second language led her to solid ground and living with heart after the death of her husband (and our Focusing colleague) Bob.

Another thing leaps out at me that is not highlighted by my categories: the wonderful things that happen are the product not only of the inner acts that we call Focusing. Those inner acts are certainly essential to the results. But there is also the context: the listeners and teachers and community of Focusers. It's when people Focus *together* that such highly

desirable results occur. Others accompanying the Focuser, knowing and putting into practice Focusing and the Focusing Attitude, are equally essential to the results.

Several of the reported transformations occurred in the context of International Focusing meetings. Others involved interaction with at least one, often more Focusing-oriented Listeners. Doralee Grindler Katonah organized a sub-section of this Folio by applying some of Gendlin's concepts to illuminate how two Focusers in cross-cultural communication are *both* changed and carried forward by that experience.

Groups of people coming together in a living Focusing environment can enable remarkable *group* — as well as individual — development. Bala Jaison's compelling account of the International in Germany shows this point: many people came to the meeting with feelings about being in Germany. Through the Focusing and Listening process facilitated at the meeting, they experienced safe conditions that allowed each person to be openly present, sharing deeply, healing wounds from the past. New ways of interacting were realized as a result of this profound collective group process.

As we bring Focusing and Listening to more groups, it can go a long way, as it did at the first International in Germany, toward healing long-standing hurts and wounds, reducing the likelihood of people polarizing into subgroups, and increasing the chances of having an inclusive group of equals understanding and caring for each other.

There are teachers, group facilitators, friends, parents and grandparents, siblings, therapists, colleagues and partners, all quietly providing empathy and the Focusing Attitude, who play a crucial role in achieving the remarkable benefits of Focusing. One of these benefits is enabling people to get beyond polarized categories of thinking.

CONCLUSION

Getting beyond polarized thinking is something that promises to increase the likelihood of living in a complicated world with more tolerance of others, and more self-nurturance.

Focusing can be a powerful change agent to move beyond polarized thinking in at least the three ways shown above. As you read on, I hope you will feel optimistic — as I do — about the peaceful power we have to make things better through our own Focusing process, through teaching Focusing, and by giving Listening and Focusing Attitudes to others in our daily lives. Collectively, we are doing this far and wide around the world. We are steadfastly at work in Gendlin's "Town." I hope that in reading these articles, those teaching and facilitating Focusing will feel encouraged, affirmed, and appreciated, for the vitally important work they are doing.

NEW PATTERNS OF RELATING
TO OURSELVES

A “SAFE CONTAINER” FOR PASSING DOWN A PRAYER TO FUTURE GENERATIONS: My Experience with the Hiroshima Peace Museum

Akiko Doi

I. INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS HIROSHIMA?

Hiroshima City is situated in the western part of Japan and is known worldwide as one of only two places — the other one is Nagasaki — where atomic bombs were dropped during World War II. It was at 8:15 in the morning of August 6, 1945 that the world’s first atomic bombing occurred. Many people died and were injured; we still do not have accurate statistics, but it is estimated that approximately 140,000 people died by the end of that year. According to a survey of the Atomic Bomb Survivor Movement, by 1998 more than 300,000 people had died — all victims of the atomic bombing.

Because Japan is the only nation which has experienced a nuclear attack, “peace study” is mandatory in public education for Japanese children. All of us have either visited Hiroshima or Nagasaki on a school excursion, or at least have learned about the disastrous consequences of the war. All Japanese have read stories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; seen educational movies illustrating people’s fearful experiences in the atomic bombing; and learned how crazy, cruel and stupid human beings can be in war situations. Every year on August 6, we pray in silence, and the Japanese mass media repeatedly write about the tragedies that happened in Hiroshima and also about the wars and conflicts still occurring in other countries. The hope is that we will not reiterate such tragic experiences anywhere in the world.

II. MY “DREADFUL” EXPERIENCE IN THE NAGASAKI ATOMIC BOMB MUSEUM 25 YEARS AGO.

As a typical child in the Japanese public school system, I studied about Hiroshima and Nagasaki many times in classes. However, I did not like to hear the stories, nor did I like to see the photos or pictures showing the disastrous scenes of the atomic bombing and its consequences. I knew it was necessary for us to understand what happened in the two cities so that we should not repeat the foolish acts that lead to wars and conflicts, but they were all too much for me: too scary and dreadful even to have a glimpse of. I closed my mind so as not to be invaded by those scary stories and just waited for the teacher’s words to finish passing through the classroom.

However, my destiny as a Japanese child did not allow me to be exempted from visiting one of the two cities. When I was a junior high school student, I had to visit the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum as part of our school trip.

The Museum then was a very old, dark, large brown building. I remember it was a very fine day; however, I felt the atmosphere around the museum was cloudy and deadly quiet as

if the museum were covered by the shadows of death. The museum seemed to stand in a blank, dark spot against the bright peaceful sunlight of the day. I did not want to enter the building, for I already knew what was there waiting for me. However, there was no escape; I had to go into the building because that was one of the highlights of the school trip.

I took a deep breath and entered with my friends. Inside the building, it was very dark and silent. There were few windows so almost no sunlight could come in. There were a number of items displayed in the dead silence: I saw melted metal, burnt clothing, the shadow of people imprinted on walls by the heat of the bombing, and much more. From the first exhibited item, I felt very scared. It was as if I were re-experiencing the cries of the dead people. I started to walk faster; then I found myself running through the corridors. I ran and ran until I reached the end of the exhibits. I did not even catch a glimpse of the remaining displayed materials. That was too much. My body refused to watch all the details of the reminiscence and aftermath of the tragedy even though my head ordered me to see the actual items taken from the bombing site.

Since then, I carefully avoided any contact with sites or materials associated with the atomic bombing. I never watched movies set in wartime; I never read atomic-bombing related books – until August 2004, when Kevin McEvenue and Paul Huschilt came to Japan to give workshops on Wholebody Focusing.

III. MY VISIT TO HIROSHIMA

I had participated in Kevin and Paul's Wholebody Focusing workshop in France in 2003, and on the last night of the workshop, we (Kevin, Paul, Teruko and I) had dinner together in Paris and discussed the details of our plan to bring Kevin and Paul to Japan for workshops. To my surprise, they were very interested in visiting Hiroshima to witness what human beings can do in war. They told me that in North America, the atomic bombing was sort of a taboo subject and that almost no one was willing to talk about it. Teruko and I were touched and moved by their words; we did not expect North Americans to be interested in the atomic bombing from a neutral point of view. So this was how the tour to Hiroshima came to be included in the workshop tour in Japan.

Although I was so impressed and grateful to them for visiting Hiroshima, I was still worried about going there. I was not sure if I could stand to look around a museum full of dreadful exhibits. However, the plan had already started. The die was cast, and we went to Hiroshima on a very sunny, hot day.

It was my first visit to that city, and I was surprised to find that the Hiroshima Peace Museum was very different from the museum in Nagasaki. In contrast to the dark atmosphere that surrounded the Nagasaki Museum, the Hiroshima Peace Museum was new, bright, peaceful, and full of light.

There were many volunteers in the museum, and one of them told me that the museum had recently been renovated. Before the renovation, the Hiroshima Museum was also dark and scary like the old Nagasaki Museum. The designers of the new museum planned to change the atmosphere because the old one was too shocking and scary for children to look

at the displayed materials. Many children were afraid to even enter the museum, and many refused to look at the displays or try to read the description of how the atomic bombing occurred. This meant that the old museum did not function as intended; it was meant to pass down the memories and facts of the atomic bombing to the younger generation and to stimulate them to think about what they could do to promote world peace. Taking all this into consideration, the museum was renovated in 1994 to bring in light from outside, with the walls painted white, and now inviting children. As it was bright and not scary, for the first time in my life, I could actually look at all the displayed materials, read all the descriptions, and watch short movies with Kevin and Paul without being caught up by fear.

IV. HOW WE USUALLY FACE FEAR

When we face fear, we tend to think we need a lot of courage. It is common to consider that “courage” is a prerequisite for facing fear. However, we all, and especially children, do not have enough courage to face fear that is so strong that it seems it might damage our daily life. Therefore, if the atomic-bombing museums were too scary or dreadful for children to even enter, the children would fail to learn anything about the tragedies and foolish acts of human beings. And we adults would have failed to pass down the memories or experiences that should be communicated to the next generation so that the tragedies will never be repeated.

V. NEED FOR A SAFE CONTAINER TO FACE FEAR: FOCUSING SETTINGS

The renovators of the Hiroshima Peace Museum were wise enough to know that they did not need to require us to have enough courage to confront tragic displays. Instead, they created a safe container that allows us to stay with what happened in Hiroshima in 1945. The Hiroshima Peace Museum is special not only because it is designed to be full of light but also because it provides a safe environment. The renovators of the museum, probably without knowing anything about Focusing, used a Focusing-friendly setting with better conditions to allow visitors to face their fears.

In Wholebody Focusing, we use our bodies as “safe containers” to step back a little from intense emotions (McEvenue, 2002; McEvenue & Doi, 2004). The Hiroshima Peace Museum offers a peaceful space for people to step back. The museum is situated in a beautiful park and surrounded by a quiet river. It looks like a small green island floating in the river.

After looking around the museum, Kevin, Paul and I walked along the river, and Kevin and I talked about what we had just seen. I told him that I could sense the sadness and anger of people more in those peaceful settings. Then he responded that without the sense of safety, we could not look at disastrous materials. We need more safety when we hold fearful or dreadful experiences; otherwise the fear takes us over. Peaceful settings make it possible for us to step back and feel safe. The more fearful the thing we are facing, the more safety we need within ourselves. We can face fear only after we have a safe place to step back to, only as we feel the whole body as a safe container.

For me, Kevin and Paul also made a wonderful contribution to the museum as a Focusing-setting. Even though they were very tired after traveling all the way to Japan and offering workshops, they showed calm but enthusiastic eagerness to look around all the displays. They did not complain how they were tired. They listened carefully to me — they did not lecture me about the lessons to be learned. They did not demand courage from me. Instead, they were calm, patient, kind, and supportive of my need for safety. I felt really connected with them and that sense of connectedness also contributed to my feeling safer in the museum. I was not alone and we seemed to share the same feelings. I was especially touched and felt supported when I saw Paul sitting in the museum hall. He was there, taking time to take in what he had just seen — he was there like a prayer. We exchanged no words; however, we seemed to share the same felt sense, which also helped me to find enough space inside of me to anchor myself and feel safe.

Kevin also told me that maybe it was Hiroshima's innate wisdom that led them to renovate the museum as it is now. Maybe they do not know anything about Focusing, but their bodily wisdom knew that they needed to provide more safety for people to look at and take in fearful experiences. This fact clearly indicates that Focusing is not a very special, professional attitude that can only be obtained through training by gifted people. Focusing is our innate wisdom. As Gendlin points out, "your body knows much that you don't know, much that you cannot possibly figure out" (Gendlin, 1981, p. 39). The renovators of the Museum "knew" that when it is safe enough, we can have space in ourselves to see dreadful tragic displays and re-experience sadness and anger.

It is not "courage" that is required to pass down tragic experiences; it is a "safe container" that enables us to contemplate what human beings have done to each other. The Focusing attitude of using one's body as a safe place to step back to is also applicable to such memorial buildings. We need a safety margin for us to step back. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum provides conditions supporting the safety required for and emphasized in Focusing – it shows how Focusing principles can be applied to hand down the past to the future generations for world peace.

VI. CHANGES THAT HAPPENED TO ME, AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

After the visit to Hiroshima, my process was carried forward. Hiroshima is no longer a place too scary to visit; now it is a place of peace, a place for prayer. This change was brought about by experiencing the safe surroundings of the museum in the company of two other focusers: all of which created good focusing attitudes for me.

Looking back on the experience in Hiroshima, I am aware that something more is happening within me. In January 1995, I experienced the Great Hanshin Earthquake. Fortunately, our family was safe and our house did not collapse (though it was considerably damaged), but we experienced a shock that was far beyond our imagination. Strangely, I do not remember the some of the time during which the earthquake occurred. I remember the first big shake, but for the subsequent 60 seconds, my memory is lost. I suspect I dissociated from the experience, and I have been afraid that I might experience flashbacks.

Yet coming back from Hiroshima, I am convinced that if I can find a safe container in which to step back (maybe with the help of Wholebody Focusing), my experience with the earthquake may be carried forward and the experience that might have been frozen can instead be integrated into myself.

My visit to Hiroshima brought a new step to me. Now I feel more safety when I think of, read, and watch atomic-bombing related materials. I am very much impressed with how experiencing the Museum as a Focusing setting worked, and with the wisdom of Focusing which is innate to human beings even if they do not consciously realize it.

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TRANSFORMING FEAR: What We Can Learn from Some People with Cancer

Joan Klagsbrun, Ph.D.

FACING 9/11

I had heard the news earlier in the day. Now the media's new understanding was that this was an attack and not an accident. Many of my clients arrived in states of full anxiety and speculation; others simply cancelled. As I listened to the reports on a radio my level of fear grew. By one p.m. the sense of horror and helplessness was palpable.

I came to the waiting room to find Jody*, whom I instinctively knew would show up for therapy. She came every week at this time and I knew that she had her chemotherapy infusion scheduled for an hour after our meeting. We hugged each other in the way that people did that day, full of grief and fear and a stunned sense that we were in the midst of a collective nightmare.

As she entered my office she took a tissue from the table, dabbed her eyes and suddenly blurted out, "Well, I must say this all feels quite familiar to me. Today the whole country knows what it feels like *every* day when you have cancer." I asked her to say more. She looked down at her hands, which were clenched together. "It feels familiar to be so vulnerable and helpless and...scared about all the implications. So we have to reach out." "I called both my kids, and my husband at work," she added, "did you call yours?" I nodded, almost unwittingly. I had felt an urgent need to hear my son's and my husband's voices just to reassure me they were all right. "This is so scary" she said, in almost a whisper.

Jody was referring both to the events of that day and to the terrible uncertainty and fear that she had experienced with her two recurrences of breast cancer. She was also referring to the way that reaching out to others seemed to mitigate the fear. Now she thought other Americans were experiencing on a visceral level the fear that she lived with daily, and which had violently overthrown the normalcy of her life, as 9/11 did for many of us. She was a veteran in this territory of intense fear, where so many of us were novices.

FEAR AND PROCESS SKIPPING

I realized in the months that followed how much Jody and other people with cancer had to teach us about living with fear. Through the intensity of their fears, like those experienced by people right after 9/11, these patients had practice and skill in transforming stark and pervasive anxiety. Now, six years later, with color-coded risk levels, an invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, genocide in Darfur, the threat of nuclear proliferation, and war in the Mideast, it seems that we have become inured to high levels of fear. It is crucial that we again remember those lessons about how to be with the experience of fear.

*All clients' names and other identifying information have been changed.

Many of us have difficulty dealing with fear in a constructive way. We armor ourselves against fear rather than sit down with it and listen to it. As the level of fear rises, we respond by armoring ourselves more strongly. Often, we try to distance ourselves from our fears through what Ed McMahon, Ph.D. calls “process skipping,” an unconscious psychological habit. Process skipping is a mechanism by which we numb ourselves against feelings that are unpleasant. As soon as we feel the discomfort of feeling scared, we typically occupy ourselves with distracting activities that suppress that unpleasant feeling. In many ways, process skipping is the opposite of Focusing. Process skipping avoids while Focusing welcomes. Process skipping numbs while Focusing opens us to feeling. The pattern of process skipping, which is a common way to react to fearfulness, obstructs our ability to find and listen to a fresh felt sense from which forward movement can evolve.

A CULTURE OF AVOIDANCE

The culture we live in is typically unsupportive in acknowledging and working with fear. And, when we do express our fears, for example, saying, “I am afraid this biopsy might reveal that I have cancer” we are often told: “Don’t worry. You’ll be fine.” Or if we say, “I am afraid that my neighbor might die in the war in Iraq,” we are told, “Don’t worry. He’ll be fine.” These reflexive responses of “not to worry” might be an attempt by the listener to bring comfort, but they simply leave us alone with our fears.

Despite the prevailing cultural norm of silencing fears and the individual tendency to “process skip,” some cancer patients in my practice have discovered better ways to come into constructive relationship with their fears through Focusing. And, as one might imagine, their fears are numerous. There is the fear that comes with being diagnosed with this dreaded disease; the fear of the treatments which can be harsh and are not always effective; the fear of the side effects of treatment; the fear of making the wrong medical decisions; the fear of disclosing the diagnosis at work, and a host of other psychological threats including fears about the effect on close family members, on one’s identity, and ultimately on one’s mortality. Some people stoically attempt to deny the fear, and some seem to be overwhelmed by their fears. However, the majority of people I see in therapy rally and adapt to their diagnoses by developing reliable ways to relate to their emerging fears. These individuals who have learned to keep company with their fears have a great deal to teach the rest of us about managing this basic human emotion.

FEAR IS INTRINSIC TO OUR NATURE

Fear is an instinctual, primitive response that is rooted deeply in our biology. It is designed to help us survive by warning us of threats to our wellbeing. If you are hiking and you see a grizzly bear running towards you, you will feel clear body signals that something important needs your attention *immediately*. However, most of the events around cancer (and other “threats” in our daily lives) that produce fear *cannot be remedied* by a fear response. The fight-or-flight response that might help one face a charging bear is not a useful response for dealing with cancer, and often proves to be counterproductive.

When facing cancer we need methods that directly speak to our uncertainty. Taken as a whole, having cancer is commonly experienced as a loss of self-control, stability, and predictability; one may feel suddenly cast adrift in a vast and stormy sea. As clients try to get their bearings it helps to have tools that will assist them in navigating in this new and strange environment.

FOCUSING AS A GUIDE

Focusing can serve as an inner compass during this period of disruption and heightened fear. Focusing teaches people to consult their *felt sense* (those bodily sensations that have meaning). The myriad of feelings that arise, and the numerous decisions that one faces (ranging from which doctors to select, to which treatments to choose) can be overwhelming, but when they are connected to the deep reservoir of knowing that resides in the body, a kind of clarity emerges. One can sense a life-forward direction. Focusing can help people keep their bearings and feel more anchored in choosing a course of treatment that feels uniquely right for them.

JODY'S STORY

Jody was in dire need of such an inner compass when she first consulted me. She was a 35-year-old teacher with two young children who felt adrift and overwhelmed. Her breast cancer had metastasized to her hips and spine and she was in a good deal of pain. “Well,” she began before she had even settled in her chair, “I’m stressed out so much of the time. I’m not sleeping well, and I’m impatient and irritable — not so much with my kids, but I sometimes snap at my mother or husband. Afterwards, I feel so angry at myself, it’s as if another, more unpleasant person has taken over my body!” She looked directly at me. “What I really need is some way to deal with all this fear. I try to think positively, but I’m afraid I’m not going to get back in remission. I’ve tried meditation, but I’m just too anxious; I start to worry, and then I get more and more fearful, and then, somehow, I can’t go back to my breath. And I don’t want to take any meds. I hope you have some new ideas.”

CLEARING A SPACE

I appreciated Jody’s direct manner and on that first day I led her through the first step of Focusing called Clearing A Space. Clearing A Space is a way to take an inventory of what you are carrying in your body that is “between you and feeling fine.” The process seemed to work well for her. Jody felt great relief right away and each week as soon as she settled in her chair she would say, “OK, glad to be here. Now I really need to clear a space.”

Although Jody was a woman with a large supportive social network with many friends and family members who cared about her, she felt she could not be fully honest with them. The fears that she was able to find and verbalize with me as she cleared a space each week were ones she could not easily reveal to others. She believed these unspoken fears would be too upsetting for others to bear.

One day when she seemed particularly agitated, I asked Jody to notice what was between her and feeling fine. The first thing she noticed that was in the way was the bone pain in her hip. She described a drilling sensation, not excruciating but constant, like a dentist's drill that wouldn't stop. I asked if she would like to get some distance from it. "Yes, definitely," she said, and then imagined that her hips were cushioned by three large soft and colorful pillows which protected her so well she could barely "hear" the drilling. Using the pillow image she was able to imagine placing the pain a few feet away in a corner of the room separated from her by these pillows. The image alone induced her to take a big exhalation, and I could see that the muscles in her face had begun to relax.

"OK, Jody, except for pain, which is cushioned for the moment, please see if you are fine. She frowned and slowly shook her head, no. "So, let's see what else might be in the way today". "Well," she said hesitantly, after a long silence, "in my abdomen I can feel a kind of achy indigestion, like there is a terribly tight ball of tangled yarn. It feels like a fist of worry, and it's really weighing on me." She was silent for a couple of moments, then began again: "It's about my youngest child, my 3-year-old daughter, Diana." She paused again and a tear rolled down her cheek. "I am afraid that if I die before she turns four that she won't remember me." As she placed that ball of fear on a shelf in the room, she and I both had tears. I reflected her being afraid and then said, "Is there more"? She nodded her head.

The next aspect of fear that she experienced appeared as tightness in her throat, as if, as she said, "I have something stuck there, and I can't swallow." She waited and finally said that what she feared was that her children would not be raised as Christians. "I'm married to Sam, who's Jewish. I'm afraid that when I die, my children won't be raised as Episcopalians. My religion is as important to me as Sam's is to him." We acknowledged that one and put that aside. Her final fear was that her 10-year-old daughter Sally would not remember her in a way she wanted to be remembered. "Of course she will remember me," Jody said, "but I think she won't remember me as a happy person." Jody felt that she was basically a joyful person, and Sally would not know that the last couple of years of her life, even though she was living with cancer, were still among the most joyful of her life. During Jody's chemotherapy treatments of the last few months she was often in bed resting and recovering and unable to play with her daughters as much as she had previously. And so she placed that fear on an empty chair across from her.

"All right," I said. "Except for those really difficult issues, is there anything else between you and feeling all right?" Jody waited and checked and then replied, "No, if it weren't for those, I'd be fine". I reassured her that we would come back to work on those issues, but in the meantime to allow herself to enjoy what it felt like to be in the cleared space, a place where she didn't have to do anything, and could allow herself to just "be". I could see her breathing deepen and her shoulders drop. Some of the lines of worry went out of her face and her expression softened. I asked if there was a word, phrase or image that captured this clearer space.

She smiled. "I'm back in the French Alps in the summer, a place that I visited once, and the word that comes is...simple, and divinely peaceful. I'm on a hill overlooking a valley, there are cows dotting the hillside, the sun is shining, and I can feel the presence of some-

thing here, something...sacred.” I reflected what she had said back to her, and asked her to allow herself to remain in that place, and see if a step might come right from that sense of beauty and sacred peace. “I want to remember the quality of this peace,” she said. “It fills me up. And I feel it will last forever, even after I’m gone.” “There is something about the quality of this peace that fills you up and will last, even after you are gone,” I reflected so she could hear her words back to see if they resonated for her. She waited a while. “Yeah, this place really speaks to me,” she said. “This place speaks to you,” I reflected. “Can you sense what it might be saying?” I asked. Jody waited. After a while she took a deep breath and sighed. A small smile crossed her lips. “It says, ‘be at peace,’” she replied. “It says, ‘all will be well.’” She opened her eyes. “Whether I am here or not, all will be well.”

HOW CLEARING A SPACE ENABLES US TO DEAL WITH OUR FEARS

The process of Clearing A Space allowed Jody to enter protected space for a while and to recover the part of her that lived without worry and was truly at peace. She found the capacity to reconnect with a deep-seated sense of wellbeing despite her physical symptoms and anxieties. Jody has been able to name and enumerate her fears and place them at a safe distance. By doing so she has tapped into the aspect of self that is witnessing the fear, but not enveloped by it. As Albert Einstein reminds us, “You cannot solve a problem with the state of mind that created the problem.” Clearing A Space allowed her to find a new state of mind.

This process of naming and clarifying issues also helps us to identify and validate them as legitimate concerns. By allowing these issues to surface and to come into the light of our compassion and caring, we give a home to a part of ourselves that needs acknowledgement. Engaging in this process of *taking inventory of what the body is carrying* allows us to release much of the bodily tension and free-floating anxiety that accompanies those issues.

Instead of dealing with fear as a clump of concerns massed together, we separate them and thus will find them more manageable to work on when we return to the Focusing process. But for the moment we remain at peace. And from the sense of peace that comes in a cleared space, people often discover a spiritual perspective on their concerns. Often they report feeling more equanimity, more gratitude, more hopefulness, more aliveness and a greater ability to get a larger view of their situation. By spending time in the cleared space they are dwelling in the present moment, which many spiritual traditions agree is the path to the sacred.

THE SPIRITUAL COMPONENT

Clearing A Space brings us back to a deep peacefulness. When we have some regular experience of feeling that sense of peace and wholeness, we begin to connect this personal sense of well being to the larger universe to which we all belong. The cleared space can offer a glimpse of an internal state that is real and available. In the West we tend to be problem-oriented and often motivated by habits of anxiety so that we spend very little time in a state where problems, anxiety, and fears are absent. Taking time to dwell within, in an “all clear or all fine” place is a rare experience. As Mark Nepo, a cancer survivor reminds us in his book *The Exquisite Risk* (2005), “Just as food is the only thing that will keep us alive when starving, joy

and peace are the things that will keep us alive when we are lost and suffering — if we can find them.” Clearing A Space is the practice of finding peace by devoting ourselves to naming and removing, through the imagination, obstacles that are in the way of this state of true wellbeing. Many find that discovering this place, and being present in it returns them to a sense of wholeness even in the midst of illness.

When clients connect with this spiritual experience in the cleared space, I frequently make the following suggestion to them: “See if it would be right to ask how you can have *more* of this in your life?” From that question often comes a life-forward direction. Sometimes answering that question results in their resolve to get out in nature more regularly or finding time to “be” instead of “do”. After tasting this experience of discovering the wider perspective of a cleared space, it is not unusual for clients to begin to engage in a creative or spiritual pursuit that elicits the feeling they found in the cleared space, whether through creating art, playing music, taking photographs, journal writing, or spending time with people they love.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CLEARED SPACE

In a research study that used Clearing A Space with women who had breast cancer (Klagsbrun et al, 2005), some of the participants used the following words to describe the cleared space they achieved:

“I imagine an elastic band stretching, kind of like a clothesline, and all my problems were put out by hand, to dry. My clear space is bright and calm.”

“I was just noticing all that is there and then the thought came...put it in God’s hands. But it wasn’t really just a thought.... I could really imagine placing it outside of me...in the center of a flower...(begins to cry).... Oh, my God...I feel such relief...just in letting go like this...I didn’t know I could feel this way at this time.... I really need this...(Silence)...Oh...I feel more relief and confidence...that in time I will know what I need to do for myself.”

“What I find there is bits of hope, multiple bits of hope. But this is real stuff — these speckles of hope are actually very promising.”

“The cleared space is kind of relaxed, light, soft and fluffy, very comfortable. I didn’t even know I had that place in me; now I can come back to it.” “Oh my, this is how I felt before I got sick. I didn’t think I could feel that way again.”

CLEARING A SPACE HELPS US TRANSCEND FEAR

As these examples illustrate, Clearing A Space functions on many levels as a method for helping us to get beyond our fears to a place of peace. We get there only by first attending to the fears. This process helps us to tease out specific fears from a generalized and often overwhelming sense of anxiety. It allows us to identify, label, and appropriately distance ourselves from each specific fear. By asking, “What’s between me and feeling fine,” it implies that “feeling fine” is a natural state and one that can be recaptured. Clearing A Space also provides a wonderful way to begin the Focusing process by tuning into the inner world via the felt sense, and by becoming an active agent within it. We not only discover obstacles to our wellbeing, we gain some control over them by putting them “at a safe distance.”

THE FEAR OF NOT BEING REMEMBERED

After Jody spent some time in her cleared space, I asked her “which one of those concerns needs your attention most today?” She chose her fear that Diana would not remember her if she died within the year. I asked her what that fear felt like in her body. “It feels cold and dark and empty to think of her growing up without me—and without even a memory of me. The image I have is of a boat unmoored floating around in the sea. I want to reach out and protect her; I am so scared that she will be harmed by not remembering her mother, and I don’t know what to do!” “So there is a part in you that is scared,” I reflected. “And you would like to reach out and protect her—to keep her from becoming unmoored.” She nodded. “Can we be gentle with that part and just spend time with it?” I inquired. “I guess this is every mother’s nightmare,” she said, softening, her self-compassion growing, “and it is happening to me. It feels very hard. She waited, eyes closed. “Now I am noticing that it feels like heaviness around my heart.” “I wonder if you could speak right from that heavy place,” I suggested. After some silence she began to speak, “I have a deep, deep sadness that she will grow up not knowing how loved she was by me.” We spent some time being with sadness and letting it speak. Then she said “I wish she could have some way to remember me in her childhood. It was such a sweet time.” She then spoke about what it was that she wanted Diana to remember, what legacy she wanted her to have. It all came out in a rush.

She recalled the pleasure that she had in reading to Diana before bed, the fun they had drawing pictures together and cooking waffles in the morning, the games they played while walking to her daycare center together and the stories her daughter had told her. And she also wanted Diana and Sally to know about her work volunteering at the hospital with other women with breast cancer that she’d started after her diagnosis, and which she found so fulfilling. “I want them to know all this, so they can remember me, and know I was there for them. But I don’t have much energy to write any of this down. I’m getting weaker, and I don’t think I can do it now,” she told me.

“So you are not sure how to do it. But see if having something written would make a difference.” She closed her eyes and after a while said “Yes, it eases the heaviness imagining that Diana in particular would have some way to remember my time with her.” She considered this idea further. “And it would be there for her to come back to when she gets older.”

We spoke about her recording these memories using a tape recorder. She contemplated that idea for a while, and then shook her head. “No, that doesn’t feel right.” I suggested we sit together and see if a right step might come to her, one that would speak to the sadness and heaviness. I have found that often clients have a sense of next right steps even when I don’t.

Jody sat in silence. After a while she sighed as if there had been some inner shift. “I can’t do this alone and don’t want to give my husband yet another task to do. I need a friend to help. I just remembered that Betty is taking a class in memoir writing. A small smile crossed her lips. “Maybe she’ll come over and write all my stories down for Diana.” She took a deep breath. “I bet she will.” The smile came more easily now. “Now the heaviness is starting to disperse a bit,” she said. She seemed both lighter and calmer when she left the office that day.

PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT WE ARE AFRAID OF

In Focusing, instead of denying our fear we sit next to it in order to hear what it has to say to us, to find what it needs. Focusing allowed Jody to open more deeply to the implicit intricacy of what she had been worried about, something which enveloped and oppressed her but which she hadn’t been able to articulate fully. Through the focusing process she was encouraged to speak about what she most feared, and to listen to herself with compassion. Finally, steps came that brought both relief and hope.

Jody’s friend Betty agreed to help her. Over a month’s time Betty interviewed Jody, took down her stories and her memories of each child, and recorded what Jody wanted them to know about the childhood she had spent with them. From these memories a separate book was created for each child. The one for Diana had photographs in it of drawings Jody and she had done together. “I feel lighter to have these books done,” she told me.

A LIFE-FORWARD DIRECTION

Jody had been able to both identify and speak about this painful fear of not being remembered by her three year old. The steps that evolved through her focusing, produced a life-forward direction that spoke to her felt sense of heaviness and transformed it. “It’s not just that I’m leaving them with something real and concrete,” she told me, “although that does make me feel good. But it’s not all of it.” She opened her eyes and looked at me. “Something’s shifted. I feel like they’ll be OK,” she paused, “even without me.”

Jody had come to a place of acceptance. It was a privilege to have accompanied her on that journey.

MINI-FOCUSING MOMENTS

Once clients learn how to find, stay with and be guided by their inner felt sense, they discover they have a compass to help them navigate the stormy waters of their illness. This compass is available in each moment. Every decision and every experience related to the illness can be checked against this reliable inner barometer that we all possess. It does not need

to be a long, drawn-out process. Teaching people that they can pause and wait and see how the whole thing feels inside, with a sense of curiosity and kindness, can be a revolutionary act for patients—moving them from passive helplessness to active engagement. Their lives then become oriented towards healing rather than just bearing the weight of their disease.

When Susan came in saying she felt dizzy with the rushed feeling of being moved from diagnosis to surgery, I suggested that she pay attention to the dizziness with an attitude of interested curiosity to see what it was trying to tell her. “It says I need to slow this train down,” she reported. “It’s going at a hundred miles an hour. I need time to collect myself and prepare for this fight. I’m not there yet and will need more time to get there.” It turned out that “more time” for her meant ten days, a change to which her doctor easily agreed. The extra time helped Susan and her family prepare themselves for this unexpected development. Listening inside to that voice of dizziness helped her to get on track and feel more in control of where the “train” was going.

Teresa, who was in remission from breast cancer, decided to have a lumpectomy that her team of doctors said was medically unnecessary—they were pretty sure that the unclear something on the ultrasounds and mammograms was simply necrotic tissue from radiation. But Teresa had been reassured before and the reassurances had turned out to be false. Her felt sense told her that she would not have peace of mind unless that “something” was removed. If she listened to her doctors’ recommendations she would have had to live with a background sense of chronic fear. By choosing the surgery she felt empowered and released of this worry. Of course someone else might have had a different felt sense and made a different decision. The felt sense honors the implicit intricacy that differs from person to person and helps each person to find what is “medicine” for him or her with utter specificity. The felt sense will change over the course of the illness, but it can be freshly accessed and seen as a trusted ally through all the phases of cancer.

SUPPORT GROUPS

As Jody understood, intense fear is often reduced by close connections to others—as was the case for Americans in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Cancer support groups often provide those close connections for people with cancer—in that they normalize the stages on the journey, offer a peer group who are living at the same frontier, and give people the opportunity to support others while gaining perspective on their own situation. But people with cancer who know how to attend to the ‘felt sense’ learn that they have the capacity to check within to see if a given support group or relationship is life enhancing or life constricting. They can sense whether the group experience, or even an afternoon visit with a friend will be a pick-me-up or a drag-me-down experience. Attending to the felt sense empowers people to choose those groups and those relationships that are truly healing.

HOW FOCUSING CAN BE AN ANTIDOTE TO FEAR

Some people with cancer, unable to deny and avoid their feelings of fearfulness have learned how to make the regular practice of focusing a part of their daily lives. Since fear can

impair decision making, increase the stress response of fight-or-flight, and overwhelm other feelings including positive ones of love, humor, compassion and inner peace, it is important to find methods that can lessen fear's ongoing negative impact. Focusing, through its combination of inner attention, silence, and listening to the felt sense, enables us to gently acknowledge and be with feelings of fear. It allows us to hear from hidden parts of ourselves that are waiting for our attention and which then can be released and lived forward. The Focusing process "turns up the volume" on our wisdom, perspective, hope and courage, and "turns down the volume" on disembodiment and worry. We would all be wise to learn what these patients have come to know. In Focusing we have a powerful way to listen to, honor, and transform our fears.

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THE STORY THAT WANTS TO BE TOLD

Joyce Kornblatt

INTRODUCTION

In recent years I've been privileged to work with writers documenting — in fiction and Memoir — personal, familial and cultural trauma arising from the tragedies of genocide, war and exile. To meet the particular needs of such people who come to me for guidance, I've created a process I call 'therapeutic mentoring.' Rooted in Focusing, I also incorporate some of what I've learned in a recent three-year training in Hakomi bodily-based psychotherapy, as well as decades as a writer and teacher of creative writing.

To demonstrate how a Focusing-oriented approach supports the process of those embarking on these narratives of bearing witness, I've invented in this paper a composite writer named 'Vera' and part of a session in which we work together on what she brings to me as her 'block.' While Vera is not an actual person I've mentored — that work remains confidential — her story resembles that of many I've actually companioned: survivors of the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, Ugandan atrocities under Idi Amin, South African apartheid and the Lebanese civil war. In our time, there seems to be no end to the suffering that arises from cultural/political violence, and also no end to the resilience of those determined to record and memorialize and understand the terrible traumas that mark their lives.

Through 'Vera,' I hope to deepen the reader's understanding of how much courage is required by such a writer, and how Focusing and focusing-related processes can help her carry forward into the next step. Often I find that someone like Vera brings with her one or more of a triple burden: 1) the need to be a 'perfect' witness for countless victims; 2) the struggle to write in spite of familial and cultural injunctions to stay silent; and 3) the encounter with an internal silencer who fears the writer will be either punished or emotionally destroyed by her memories and the act of recording them. Meeting these 'blocks' in a Focusing way can transform them into something new or become content themselves, rather than obstructions.

VERA'S STORY

Vera, 75, arrives at my home office in Sydney for a private mentoring session. A friend who took a writing workshop from me has referred her. Vera is gregarious, intelligent and charming, but I also note her wariness — both confidence and fear live in her body. She wants to write about her girlhood, but each time she begins something inside stops her. She written a lot about other subjects — books and articles in her field of 20th century French literature — so she doesn't doubt her capacity to make a good sentence and see a project through. In terms of the memoir, however, she's labeled the problem cowardice, failure of nerve, and says, "Maybe I just don't have what it takes to go back there." She says, "I always planned to write this book when I retired from teaching, but it's been two years now and it

doesn't happen." She's despondent and a bit angry at herself. I offer to work with her in a Focusing manner, explaining briefly what that would mean. Often what appears to the conscious mind as a 'block' or a failure of imagination or a *not-having-what-it-takes*, I suggest, reveals it quite differently when contacted in a Focusing process.

She takes that in, as if appraising what I've said. Then she offers me some of her story. Though at this point she isn't ready for an actual Focusing process, I see enough trust is establishing itself for her to share more information with me. We may get to Focusing this session, or not. We may have many more sessions, and at some point a Focusing process will happen. I can't know that at this point — I can only meet Vera where she is. She tells me she's Hungarian-born, Jewish and a Holocaust survivor. She speaks of these details in a tentative and tremulous way, revealing the child-like vulnerability that lives in this sophisticated and accomplished woman.

I'm also a trained somatics-oriented psychotherapist, and I'm aware of how much trauma may be held in this woman's body, how we will need to move slowly and tenderly, taking opportunities to appreciate small victories and depths of resilience. Often, the 'block' in relation to expressing traumatic memory is serving the good purpose of protecting the person from the flooding of the nervous system that excavating the contained trauma might precipitate. The organism — the person — saves herself from being re-traumatized by shutting down the attempt to 'tell the story.' This is not the same thing as an inner critic that inhibits the telling of the story — it is more a kind of regulator that functions on a somatic level of experience. At the same time, there may be a 'crossing' with fears from the past about retribution or madness. It's important in working with traumatic material to honor this defense that Vera brings to me as 'the problem.'

It's vital to proceed at the speed in which the person's own inner guidance suggests is wise for her. To give the person the 'unconditional positive regard' that Carl Rogers taught and demonstrated.

In addition to the few biographical details, Vera spends some time telling me about 'the problem' with her writing while she carefully avoids sharing anything more of the material about which she wants to write. "I'm a survivor," she ventures, and not much more — as if she's assessing the wisdom of revealing even that much to a stranger. She relates all the false starts and avoidance strategies, speaking with vivid humor, but I see the pain in her eyes, which the wit attempts to mask. She also catalogues her scholarly achievements for me, as if she needs to reassure me, and herself, that she is a capable person, this memoir is a special case. "I'm not used to failing", Vera says. "In fact, I've been a workaholic".

When she comes to a pause, I thank her for sharing that much of herself with me, and ask if she'd like to know more about how Focusing might assist her. She nods. I explain in more detail about the felt sense, Eugene Gendlin's Focusing model, Ann Weiser's inner-relationship Focusing, how I use the process myself in my own writing life as well as in my mentoring of others, and she looks reassured. I let her know she's in full control, and any time she wants to signal 'enough' it is fine with me. Gendlin's 'little steps' come to mind, and I offer that phrase as an intention to work together gently, 'taking little steps,' in no rush to get somewhere or fix anything. I invite her to sample Focusing by checking inside to see

what comes when she asks her body, “How am I about working in a Focusing way with Joyce?” She takes up the invitation, closes her eyes. “Something feels safe,” she says, touching her heart, and I can hear the primacy that word — *safe* — has for her.

Because Vera has meditated for many years, turning inward is a familiar movement, and we can begin our session with an ease others might not feel so readily. Were that not the case for her, I would have suggested we do more experiments together in meeting the felt sense, so that she could become comfortable with the territory that I’ll be supporting her to explore. When she asks the question to her body — “What’s this whole thing about not being able to write about my childhood?” — I can see that she is attuning, waiting, available for what will come. So far, the safety that is so crucial to her is in place, and the contact with the felt sense is possible.

Vera sits with her eyes closed for several minutes. This can feel like a long time to the Focusing listener, but I have learned to be patient with not knowing if the person is in touch with a felt sense or not. When she is finally ready to speak, Vera begins a cascade of felt-sensings and accompanying memories that might strike a reader as an unrealistically-fast unfolding of her inner reality.

But it is my experience that when someone is wanting to write about an extreme trauma, that wanting-to-speak, however blocked it might be, has brought the trauma very close to the surface. Once that initial ‘something’ is contacted inside in a felt-sense way, it is very difficult for the person to pull back into silence or confusion.

The story-waiting-to-be-told is a bit like a fetus being born — once the head emerges the rest of the body will quickly follow. The release is organic; if there is any difficulty at this point it’s not usually around the person shutting down again, but rather about the overwhelm that might happen as ‘this whole thing’ becomes conscious as an experience. In Hakomi work, which is based on Focusing and mindfulness processes, this release of powerful feelings around a long-silenced or not-fully-contacted experience is called ‘riding the rapids,’ and produces the good effects of catharsis and consciousness — but if trauma is being accessed, ‘riding the rapids’ can shift into ‘flooding,’ which can all too easily re-traumatize the person. It will be my function in what follows to attune to what is unfolding in Vera and what might be needed from me.

So, she poses the question to her body: “What’s this whole thing about not being able to write about my childhood?” — and we wait several minutes for a reply. Vera says softly, almost whispering, “A fist.” She touches her solar plexus and winces. “A fist in there.” I reflect back to her: “Something feels like a fist in your solar plexus.”

“Yes,” she says, “and it’s not mine. I can see anger on her face now, hear it in her voice. “So this fist-thing inside isn’t yours and something doesn’t like it inside you.”

Tears come now to Vera, and anxiety. She’s trembling. “It’s a bad fist,” she says.

A little-girl state is present in her body, her eyes are closed and behind them I see rapid blinking. From my Hakomi somatics training, I know that signals the arising of old memories. “Maybe there are memories coming now,” I suggest, leaving room for being wrong with my *maybe*.

She nods her head yes, again like a child. She's sitting now as a child would, with her feet turned toward each other on the floor. "He's hitting Papa with his fist!" She wails out the words. "And I can't do anything to help him!" At this point Vera begins to sob quietly. It's as if a membrane separating her from her past has broken, and the memories of that childhood time are experienced as if in present time. "You felt helpless," I say. "Helpless to save your papa. You're remembering that terrible day here in this room now."

I am consciously signaling Vera that she's survived that moment and is having a memory of it, rather than actually experiencing it afresh. Invoking a resource in her in the present, I say, "Can you and I, the grown-ups Vera and Joyce, be here together for the little Vera?"

If Vera remained identified with the suffering of that day in Hungary so many years ago, I might have moved into some somatics work to ease the flooding that can turn a Focusing process into a re-traumatizing experience. I might have placed my hands on her knees, or my feet on her feet, or offered her a pillow to cradle against her chest — some physical contact that would bring her back into her here-and-now body, into relationship with the present. In this instance, Vera is able to make that shift herself. The traumatic activation subsides organically, and the empowering, integrating insight arrives:

"I've been ashamed all my life that I didn't save Papa from the Gestapo that morning. They beat him up and took him away and I never saw him again." She's weeping, quietly now and with a kind of composure that is holding the pain. She is holding herself in her own arms, rocking slightly, as if she were a mother to herself. The trembling has calmed. Her whole system has softened.

"You've realized how you felt you'd failed him," I say. "And how you've carried that shameful guilt inside you all your life."

"I've been ashamed to write, that it would all come out, that people would know what a bad little girl I was."

"Something's been ashamed," I say, "and now something new has compassion for that child you were."

"How could I have fought off a Gestapo brute? But that's what I believed I should have done. I have believed it until today."

"Little Vera had that confusion," I say. "The adult sees how things really were."

Vera lets out a huge sigh that signals a shift. Her whole body has relaxed. She's not sitting like a frightened child now, nor like a rigidly-defended woman. She begins to speak about the story of her father's 'arrest,' and how she and her mother were sheltered in a convent for months, then spirited out of Budapest to England just before the mass deportation of Hungary's Jews. From England, Vera and her mother traveled to Australia, where we are sitting together now.

CONCLUSION

Through the use of Focusing, Vera has had a profound opening in her first session — meeting the life-long shame she’s carried unconsciously of not having been able to save her father. In subsequent sessions, over the course of a year, she will work with additional layers of resistance that she finds in the process of writing her story. She’ll begin to touch on how much the fear of being shamed resulted in a perfectionism around her scholarly work, hindering her in the writing of the memoir. Freed now to speak, she will find she has to ‘say it all perfectly,’ and who will be the judge of that? Such an inner critic is never satisfied, and without the deadlines imposed by scholarly journals and conferences, she can see how she might never be able to complete the ‘not good enough’ memoir. As that belief softens via Focusing work with the ‘one who needs to get it perfect,’ another layer of blockage arises to be met and understood: if she finishes the book, she’ll lose her final link to her father and lost Hungarian girlhood. The goodbye she could not say as a child is finally possible, and Focusing allows Vera to see how much she doesn’t want to say it. “I never really grieved,” she says at that point in our mentoring work. “I just shut down to all the sorrow.” We’ll spend some time gently allowing the waves of grief that want expression.

All of these ‘strata’ of resistance will become part of Vera’s writing — she’ll discuss in her book what she has to face and process in the present in order to narrate the past. And this act will become the integration the traumatized self requires. A writing project begun as a guilty obligation to another becomes, through a Focusing-informed process over time, an act of self-respect and personal healing.

It is important to state that this process of mentoring and the writing it frees is not always a fluid and ever-opening experience. Old structures can re-form in the body/mind; long-held beliefs find ways to insist themselves again into our nervous system, dream life, and cognitive functioning. And yet the capacity to meet these ‘obstacles’ again and again, with the gentle gift of Focusing, actually allows for an entire shift in *who one takes herself to be*: though difficulties remain, the sense of them as fixed and impermeable changes. For me, this is the most important realization anyone I mentor can have. My work is not to make the ‘obstacles’ vanish — that is impossible and presumptuous — but to assist the writer in coming to a new relationship with them. As Vera uses Focusing more and more in our work together, and on her own as she writes, she encounters her very being as a creative process that is revealed to her by the ‘problems’ that once seemed insurmountable, when it came to writing about her past.

For Vera, the key shift will remain the discovery of her shame in our initial Focusing process. She will include that shaming in the writing itself, owning it, seeing her memoir as a witnessing of what happened to her family decades ago, as well as a narrative of the aftermath of those events — how the past has lived on in her. Being able to make this connection between past and present brings a level of healing to Vera she hadn’t expected. This comes as the result of cultivating, in our work together, the capacity of Presence to hold the young Vera and the older Vera with compassion. She will meet many forms of ‘the critic,’ and will learn ways to either engage creatively with these judges and managers, or to simply ask them to ‘sit over there’ while ‘I do my work over here.’ She finds a new way of empowering herself

that's rooted in self-respect and patience. In one meeting she tells me that the most she had hoped for was 'to get all this off my chest once and for all,' as if ridding herself of a toxic substance. What she comes to find is far more positive, and intricate, than that.

Far from making the suffering worse — or simply excising it as one would a sickened organ — she opens to the scale of it, seeing how it has functioned within her all her life. She can now acknowledge how large a burden she has carried, and how resourceful she has been in the face of it — accepting what is available to her now. What she had carried in her conscious mind as a narrative of a victimized family transforms as she works into a meditation on memory, resilience, and self-forgiveness.

I have seen this happen in so many of the writers I have mentored, who come in imagining that they have a specific story to exorcise or to present to the world as their responsibility to others. They discover as they work in a Focusing manner, the layers of intricacy and responsiveness in themselves to which they had not been attuned. What seemed like a known story that the person was having difficulty writing becomes a new or expanded narrative that is fuller, richer, and surprising, opening up layers of intricate depth, that hadn't been consciously known. These discoveries, as much as the re-telling of the memories, heal the soul who believes herself to be defined by the past, or who fears that the past could still destroy her. Focusing offers the writer with a traumatic story a way to become bigger than the pain, and what had been a haunting can now be transformed into peace.

EARTHQUAKE FOCUSING: Continental and Personal Shifts

Nina Joy Lawrence

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.

COPING WITH FEAR IN SHORT TERM EXPERIENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY

Mia Leijssen

INTRODUCTION

My first concern in every therapeutic encounter is the quality of the interpersonal relationship because the interaction between client and therapist is the living space in which the client's healing process can occur. Even the best therapeutic methods are limited by the context of that relationship. This means that I'm fully present and that I attune myself to the client in an empathic and non-judgemental way (Rogers, 1961). I see an authentic encounter as a crucial curative factor in its own right as well as facilitative for other tasks. Gendlin (1981, 1996) developed the intrapsychic task 'Focusing' as a way of helping clients access their experience.

To this end the therapist can lead the client through different processes from Clearing A Space, to attending to and symbolizing the bodily felt sense. When a client is overwhelmed with fear, it is crucial that the client learns to form a new intrapsychic relationship with the fear, so that traumatic memories can transform. In this article I will demonstrate a way of working with trauma and overwhelming fear that does not necessarily involve going over and over memories and flashbacks, but rather might be a short-term way of working that really frees the person to heal oneself and go forward in a different way in one's life. I will use several vignettes from short term experiential psychotherapy as an illustration of how the Focusing-oriented approach can be established in practice with an anxious and overwhelmed client¹ dealing with difficult life events. Being subject of a case study she indicated in her post-therapy interview with the researcher² that the most helpful event of her therapy was paying attention to her bodily felt sense.

The therapeutic effect of Focusing has relied not only on the procedure as such, but also on the relationship. Therefore I will first describe the necessary conditions for establishing a productive working alliance. After having 'set the base' I will go into the details of working with the overwhelming fear and facilitating a healthy intrapsychic relationship.

ESTABLISHING THE NECESSARY WORKING ALLIANCE

During the first encounter with a client I always start by actively trying to build a good working relationship. In order to facilitate a fast developing working relationship, it is important that the client can experience the therapist as competent, caring and empathic. The welcoming space I offer right from the beginning has the quality of '*good mothering*'. This means: being present in a warm-hearted, friendly and affectionate way, and listening empathically to what the client tries to express. The accent lies here on the supporting and exploring relationship as the central instrument to facilitate the client's life narrative. Many clients get stuck in the story they construct in order to understand their life. Their ways of

self-narrating can be too narrow, or they live with limiting, incomplete, disjointed stories. In addressing such difficulties, the therapist guides the process mainly by means of empathic reflections and exploratory questions. Empathy generally suffices to enable the therapist to understand the complex reality of the client and to help the client in constructing a more complete or coherent life narrative during the therapeutic dialogue. At the level of empathic responding the therapist offers a first elementary remedial response:

“Empathic understanding plays a particularly crucial role in therapy with clients who have suffered empathic failure in childhood to the point that their ability to hold and process experience has been severely compromised. . . . The ongoing presence of a soothing, empathic person is often essential to the person’s ability to stay connected without feeling overwhelmed. . . . The communication of empathy tends to facilitate change because it generates a particular sense of experiential recognition within the other person. . . . This is a value in itself as a form of human connection and it also tends to shift one’s relation to implicit, bodily felt, non-conscious aspects of experience, opening these to awareness and change” (Warner 1996, p.140, p.130).

To develop and maintain rapport and relatedness and to get the sense of the client’s embodied whole, I take time to synchronise with the client’s body. The nonverbal communication is complementary to the narrative. The body of the client is speaking, but the client doesn’t hear its message. I try to sense what the client is experiencing by observing his/her body language and I try to bring the client’s bodily knowledge back into the spotlight and into the client’s awareness by valuing nonverbal expressions. So I am actually responding as much to the face, voice, gestures...that accompany the story, as to the content. I can give a verbal reflection of the nonverbal behavior of the client, or I can also choose a nonverbal way to direct the client’s attention to the not yet labeled emotion, as there are mirroring postures or movements. By means of these interventions I focus the client’s attention on ‘something’ that is already present — but ‘something’ that the client has not paid full attention to — or something about which the client is not yet away aware. (Leijssen, 2006).

Building a good working relationship also implies offering ‘*good fathering*’, meaning that experiences get named, that structure emerges from chaos, that reality will be faced, and that there is authentic communication. Inadequate fathering — which is always the case with clients who are victims of incest, or when the fatherly role was not rightly embodied by someone in the client’s life — leaves the client somehow incapable of using clear verbal expressions to conceptualize what is going on inside and outside, and of setting limits. Further, the therapy can suffer from inadequate fathering when the therapist does not set limits and endlessly gives in to the client’s feelings and needs, without stimulating the client to conceptualize the experiencing process. If the therapist waits in a non-directive attitude, clients can lose themselves in rather vague talking, without really coming to the point. A therapist who shrinks away from ‘getting down to business’ and structuring the therapeutic happening, can cause therapy to become an unproductive and formless process with much unnecessary waste of time. The therapist will endeavour to restore meaning by offering a form-providing, limit-setting interaction.

“The structure and limits protect the client. The therapist carries certain responsibilities...All feelings are welcomed, but possible actions are highly restricted. That keeps therapy from becoming like other relationships. The limits on actions make depth possible. Limiting the relationship in breadth, fencing it off on the left and right, defines a central channel between client and therapist in which they can relate more deeply and in a more real way than we usually do in our needful and twisted personal relationships” (Gendlin 1996, p.303).

Life narratives are fundamentally organized within and across *time*. So I make time explicitly part of the therapeutic process and use time therapeutically by making explicit agreements about the length and the number of therapeutic sessions we are going to work together. For treatments where it is difficult to estimate how long will be needed, I find it useful to work within shorter time frames: evaluations can be set for every 5 or 10 sessions, each time involving an exploration of how the treatment is going and what further is needed (Jaison, 2002). The working with clear time frames has the function of maintaining awareness of progress and quality of therapy, thus preventing it from falling into endless talking or stagnation. Working with time limits requires realism and being strong enough to deal with disappointment, frustration and even anger in a constructive way. Furthermore it is important to keep in mind that clients often find the early steps of the change process enough for their needs. It is much more often the therapist who finds the result unsatisfying, because the therapist is still painfully aware of the unreclaimed, raw problem areas and the unrealized further possibilities for growth. To respect the limits of time implies that many problems do not have to be solved; however, it does mean that clients have to be able to mobilize enough means to continue with the change process they have started in therapy. In order to build a good working alliance I try to find an agreement with the client on the issues we can work on together in a given time frame and I give some explanation — and even more important: already some experience — of my therapeutic approach.

Case study sessions 1–2

A 40-year old woman comes to see me, saying that she has already been in therapy 3 times and that all these previous therapies ‘failed’. The first was with a non-directive therapist; the client decided after 6 sessions that “the conversations were not helping her”. The second was with a behavioural therapist, whom she “fled” after 3 sessions because “he pushed her very hard,” and she did not “feel safe with him”. The third was with a psychiatrist who gave her medication to reduce her fears. She got confused and stopped seeing him after a series of sessions because there were boundary violations.

In terms of her history, situation and presenting problems, her father was an alcoholic who abused her, while at the same time he was respected by others for his high level of professional functioning. The family had to keep up appearances, even while she was being traumatized. She is married to a partner who also abuses her and their children; she cannot control his aggression. Her partner has pressured her to give up her career, and now she is financially dependent on him. She wants to have therapy because she cannot control her

restlessness and feelings of fear, and because she feels overwhelmed by scary reminiscences from the past.

She talks about all this during the first session, in which I mainly confine myself to being attentively present, giving supportive empathic reflections, and from time to time asking for clarification or concrete examples. In this way, during the first session, the narrative construction of her identity comes to life. Her narrative shows that she has already thought and talked a lot about her life, and that the acute problems for which she is seeking help now predominantly belong to the intrapsychic and interpersonal domains. Because her long story takes up the entire first session, we do not get to the point of discussing a working contract. I propose that we look at this during a second exploratory session.

She enters the second session in very agitated state. Because she is panicking, I suggest we try a calming exercise from the experiential repertoire. I facilitate her making contact with her body, and to name elements of her painful past, without going back to those traumas. At the end of the session she says that today's approach appeals to her. She has the feeling that "her wounds are being bandaged" and that there is "someone who understands her and brings her to safety".

The client has just had her first experience with 'Clearing A Space', a microprocess from the Focusing approach. I offer to work mainly with Focusing because she feels helped by this experiential approach. I explain that this approach can help her to deal differently with everything that scares her and makes her restless. I also let her know that the problems that she has with her violent partner will not be solved during these individual therapy sessions. Because her partner wants nothing to do with therapy, we agree that we will need to look for a way in which she can deal differently with his aggression. Based on her history with boundary-crossing behaviour, her perfectionism, and her strange resilience, I suspect it will be good for her to have a clearly marked space for exploration. I propose to start with a working contract of 10 sessions.

DEVELOPING A HEALTHY INTRAPSYCHIC RELATIONSHIP

The therapist-client relationship is never the therapeutic goal; the intention is rather to have the client develop a relationship with him or her self, and be capable of processing life events, of discovering meaning, and of generating symbols and actions beneficial to both the client and the environment. Experiential therapy is restoring contact with the meaning-feeling body in which existence manifests itself. The vague bodily felt sense, the unformed, the unspeakable can only let itself be known when it is approached in a specific way. Dealing with this inner object of attention requires an attitude of remaining friendly and quietly present with the not-yet-speakable, being receptive to the not-yet-formed (Iberg, 1981). However, this way of giving attention inwardly is unusual in an outward-directed society, and many clients offer resistance because they experience this inner process as threatening. This attitude presupposes tolerance for uncertainty, and an ability to give up control. Not knowing exactly what is going to emerge is very frightening to people who have been used to keeping emotions down. It is obvious that a person will only dare to adopt such an attitude if there is already a good deal of interpersonal security. While the relational conditions

continue to have a decisive role, specific tasks and procedures can be applied in a different way based on the client's issues.

The experiential approach uses several methods to actualize the experiencing process and to help the client develop a renewed intrapsychic relationship (Elliott, Watson, Goldman & Greenberg, 2004). Specific process signals from the client tell the therapist when to introduce a specific process-task, which the therapist encourages in an active way, always in the context of providing a safe and supporting interpersonal relation. The Focusing process, as it was introduced by Gendlin (1981, 1996), is a special way of paying attention to one's felt experience in the body. By carefully dwelling on what is quite vague at first, one can get in touch with the whole felt sense of an issue, problem or situation. Through interaction with symbols, the felt experience can become more precise, it can move and change, it can achieve a felt shift: the experience of real change or bodily resolution of the issue. The inclusion of the simple invitation to pay attention to the body as sensed from the inside, can facilitate the Focusing process. So when the client says something important, the therapist can ask: "If you put your attention in the middle of your body, what comes in your body about this?" Or an invitation such as: "Wait a moment, can you check inside and sense what you are feeling there?" If this bodily source is not too strange for the client, the symbols arrive right from that place, and the therapy will immediately deepen. Once the client is attuned to sensing his or her body from inside, the recognition that situations and affect are carried and reflected in the body can start, and the felt sense process can develop.

In order to teach Focusing systematically, Gendlin described a model which involves six process steps, with many details grouped under each: Clearing A Space; getting a Felt Sense; finding a Handle; Resonating (handle and felt sense); Asking; Receiving. I use these steps as microprocesses at various moments in therapy, not for the purpose of teaching Focusing, but in order to establish the working conditions that are optimal for facilitating particular kinds of self-explorations. The various microprocesses require several skills on the part of the client. The difficulties which clients may encounter can be described as follows: 1) the client is unable to find the right distance or a proper relationship with the felt sense; 2) the client remains stuck in one of the components of the felt sense (body sensations, emotions, symbols, life situations) instead of allowing the full felt sense with its four components to emerge; 3) the client is led astray by interfering ways of reacting (inner critic, superego) which prevent the client from fully receiving the felt sense. The therapist will have to intervene differently as a function of the specific difficulties in the client process (for details and illustrations see: Leijssen, 1998; Stinckens, Lietaer & Leijssen, 2002).

So at the start of a therapy session, I have the implicit or explicit question for the client — and for myself: "What is calling for attention right now?" The verbal interventions with which I invite the experiencing body to take the lead are normally rather short. But some clients might need more guidance and practice to learn how to let a bodily felt sense come in relation to their life experience. To facilitate this, it may make sense to begin with the microprocess of '*clearing a space*', in order to openly grant the body the time to reveal what it brings along. Attention is first turned to the body by following one's breathing and noticing what's there in each part of the body. The client asks inside: "How am I right now? What am I bringing along with me at this moment? What comes to my attention?" Every perception,

physical sensation, topic or feeling coming to the fore is acknowledged. It is briefly touched upon and given a place without its content being dealt with, as yet. This may be done, for example, by naming it out loud, or by writing some aspect of it down — as one would on a shopping list — without doing the actual shopping yet. The client may thus put into words those issues that preoccupy him or her, and the therapist reflects them briefly.

One can go on with this until one feels sure all worries have been acknowledged and temporarily put down. After all problems have been given a suitable place, clients may experience a feeling of peace, life energy, and being centered. When I guide this process for the client, I find it useful to go briefly through this clearing space step myself: this brings me in touch with the various experiences that live in me during my work. Chances of mixing up my own topics with those of the client are thus decreased. It also helps me to put my worries aside so as not to be preoccupied by them when I should be giving my full attention to my clients. The Clearing A Space microprocess may thus be a form of centering and ‘mental hygiene’ for the therapist as well. The Focusing step of ‘Clearing A Space’ is comparable to certain techniques of meditation or mindfulness. Attention is shifted from outside to inside, from speaking to silence, from thinking to experiencing, and the body is given the opportunity to bring to the surface what it (often unwittingly) carries along. Everything that comes up is briefly given attention, but nothing is dealt with. Then everything is put down, the person extricates him or her self from the problems, thus creating room for an influx of positive energy and lightness. This process is in itself a healing one; it creates the experience of a ‘new me’, untouched by difficulties, but capable of finding a better way of relating to one’s problems from its position as observing self.

The phase of ‘clearing space’ being completed, the client may be invited to choose one issue to work with in the session. Focusing works best when the client can be *with* the feelings, not *in* them. Some distance between oneself and one’s problem is needed to make an inner relationship possible. As the therapist, I’m attentive and noticing that the client can stay at the ‘*right distance*’, which means: making contact with the problem without coinciding with it. “In fact, real progress seems to involve maintaining a part of oneself that is apart from the intensity, and supporting that part as one explores the intense emotion” (Iberg 1996, p.24).

Finding and keeping a proper way of relating is an important therapeutic skill which may be applied in different contexts, for example; at the start of a therapy session, during the therapeutic process, in crisis situations. Often the client’s difficulties have to do with a wrong distance between him or her self and the experience. Either the distance is too large and the client remains too far from the experience, thus feeling nothing and being out of touch, or else the distance is too small and the client is too close and flooded by the problems so that no ‘self’ remains to relate to what is felt. It is not even unusual to see a client switch around from too far to too close. The therapist will intervene differently according to whether the client is too far or too close in relation to the problems (for illustrations see Leijssen, 1998).

In a *too far* process sometimes clients do not know the body as an internal authority; they look for meaning ‘outside’, such as other authorities (including the therapist), theories or books. They concentrate on intellectual processes and speak from there; they explain and rationalize a lot. Introducing an approach addressed to the body is often a necessary step in bringing such clients in contact with a new source of knowledge: their own inner bodily felt

authority. In order to learn to sense the body from inside it is sometimes sufficient to use a simple invitation such as: "Take your time to feel how you are inside your body... Follow your breathing for a moment, simply breathing in and out, without wanting to change anything to it...What strikes you when your attention scans your body?" The therapist can also ask the client to close his or her eyes for a moment and see how different areas in the body feel. Breathing and sensations in the throat, chest, stomach and abdomen receive full attention. Also non-verbal approaches like music, movement, drawing, can be very facilitative in these cases (Leijssen 1992). Should the therapist choose to let the client start with some form of relaxation, one should see to it that the relaxation does not become too deep; indeed, Focusing demands full concentration and keen receptivity. During deep relaxation there is no felt sense. Relaxation is too deep when the body no longer 'talks back'.

At the other end of the continuum is the *too close* process. Clients can be overwhelmed by too many feelings and sensations. These clients show, verbally or non-verbally, that too much is coming their way or that their experiences are too intense. Markers that the therapist's help is needed in creating more distance are: the client shows aversion for what emerges, or feels anxiety or tension, or feels flooded by something in which one drowns or loses oneself, or else the client may totally identify with the experience. When dealing with a too close way of relating the therapist calls upon the human's natural capacity to 'split', and on the enormous power which may be contained in one's imagination. The therapist encourages the client to distinguish 'parts' in oneself over which one can develop a certain amount of control, or to which one can give special care. There are several ways of helping a client find the right distance. The most usual way of creating distance when the client's way of relating is too close, is to ask the client to assign a place for the problem, outside of oneself. This process of creating distance may be helped along even further at a fantasy level by using various metaphors. Should the problem be very threatening or frightening, it may not be enough to put it at some distance but one may have to put up a 'fence' between it and the client. Thus the client who is overwhelmed by anxiety when trying to speak about her aggressive father, may imagine not only that father is put away in the most remote corner of the therapy room, but also that a 'cage' has been built around him, as is sometimes done in court with dangerous criminals. Or the client may draw something which he or she finds very threatening and stick the drawing on the outside of the therapy room window. However when the client is overwhelmed by something 'childlike' in quality, or which is very dear, then other metaphors may have to be called upon to create the proper distance. Thus it would hardly be compassionate towards the client who coincides with wounds received in childhood, to just put these away somewhere in the therapy room. Indeed, the place assigned should be 'outside' while it should also be taking care of that part of the client. Thus one may ask: "Could you take that wounded child on your knee", thus introducing distance while still respecting the sensitivity of the issue.

In brief, the request to put away at some distance what is too close can never be stereotyped. It will always imply a search — in interaction with the client's reaction — for a form adapted to the client's needs, while firmly and inventively promoting a distance between the client and the problem. Whichever way one chooses to create a distance, in no event is creating a distance the same as 'putting the problem away', 'forgetting it' or 'repressing it'. It is rather a friendly search for a good spot for it, in consultation with the client's feelings and images. It is an attempt at establishing a better intrapsychic relationship, whereby the client

gets space to look at problems instead of coinciding with them and whereby the energy and healing power of the observing self becomes free to face the problems and get a hold of the situation.

Case study sessions 3–10

In this therapy, from session 3 on, at the start of each session attention is paid to: “What is calling for attention right now?” and “What do we select from all that to work on?” For this client, the all-consuming fear, caused by her traumatic past and the aggression of her current partner, is always at the surface during the first phase of the therapy. That is why we mostly start by Clearing A Space, so we can look at the problem from a safe distance.

We work with the image of the “hurt child” who has been through a lot, but does not dare to talk about it. Because this hurt child often stops functioning and is often overwhelmed with fear, the client gladly accepts the proposal that “the hurt child can stay at the house of the therapist during the week”. She feels herself beginning to feel better as a result of this idea and notices during the following week that she is not so much thrown off her balance while fighting with her aggressive partner.

In the sixth session she feels “a lot of tears” during the Focusing exercise, even though she does not cry. When I ask her what she needs most now, she answers, “To get rid of the scary images from the past.” I realize we have to proceed carefully here because she has previously warned me of her inclination to flee. I ask her which images from the past she wants to lose. She describes two frightening images. I can feel how these terrible experiences would be unbearable for a child, as they would also be for most adults. Almost unnoticeably to her, I guide her to attend to the images as though they are in a film she is watching with me, and from a safe distance; this is instead of allowing her to identify with the abused child and to drown in the traumatic experience. The only thing I do, is carefully observe her expressions and verbally communicate my strong presence. During her narrative of these past traumas, I am witnessing as the therapist, how the little girl was being abused and experienced unbearable fear and pain. I feel her strong appeal to me for consolation. But from my felt sense I also feel it would not be right to touch her right now. At that moment, I do not know exactly why I feel this way. Later, however, I become aware of my understanding that if I were to meet her need for consolation with my physical presence, I would make her too dependent on me as a person, and I would also be taking something from her. At the end of this session I propose she “put the tape with the film of the horrible images in the closet in my therapy room”. It touches me that she says the child wants to feel consolation! Above all the child wants to recount a lot more without being responsible for others. She needs acknowledgement of the sadness she was never allowed to express. Again I only allow myself to give her warm verbal support reflecting my openness to what she has to tell.

In the next session she says she has felt a lot calmer and safer during the week, but that the “tapes with the film have been in the back of her head the whole time”. When I ask her what is so important on those tapes that she needs to keep with her, she answers: “My child is in there, everything I am right now is connected to it.” I suggest we together carefully watch the film again, and that she stays in contact with her body when it expresses its needs.

She says immediately that she needs to protect her child in the film. I ask her to take the child in her lap and watch the film alongside me. Doing that immediately gives her a warm feeling and she says: “the film shrivels up”. She now describes how the child in her lap has endless fear, pain, and sadness, and how it needs never-ending consolation. This image of the child leaning against her shoulder stays very strong while she recounts parts of what the child has been through. “But”, she says, “it does not have to explain all that, it is enough that it feels comforted and that this comforting will continue as long as it is needed.”

Seeing and hearing her say this makes me realize that this self-comforting is much more powerful than anything my physical touch could have offered in this therapy session. It does not surprise me when at the end of the session she says she “no longer needs to leave the hurt child behind with the therapist”, because she is now aware of how she can comfort and protect it. Related to this, she recounts how her mother was never there to protect and comfort her. This makes her sigh, because it is a relief to be able to express these forbidden feelings about her deceased mother. I think I can say that the interactional message is that she does have a place here that offers enough support, safety and protection, to let the horrible things from the past come to the surface, without allowing them have bad consequences for her — and the people around her. Meanwhile “her child has fallen asleep leaning against her shoulder”. She tells how exhausting everything has been for the child, while she herself was never allowed to rest; she always had to stay alert for approaching danger. She leaves the session “holding the sleeping child”.

She starts session eight by recounting that she had a “week full of love”. “The sleeping child” stayed with her the whole time. The horrible images from the past have not come back and her fear has disappeared. It feels good to her to give this child — alongside her real children — a place in her life.

Returning after a vacation of 3 weeks, she recounts in session nine how glad she is that the family vacation went really well. For the first time in her life, she sees that she has “to get used to moments of feeling happy”.

Session 10 is a previously-arranged evaluation of the therapeutic process. “Where are we now?” The crucial change in the client after session 7 has remained stable: the horrible images from the past have not come back. The client found it very helpful that she was taught a method to point her attention to her bodily felt sense without being overwhelmed. Later, in the follow-up session when she is being interviewed by the researcher, she points to session 6 and 7 as the crucial phase in which she learned “once and for all to point my attention to what my body has to say, and that I experience that as very helpful and making me stronger”.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This way of working with a client with childhood trauma can be applied in other healing contexts. The model can also be very helpful to people who are experiencing other kinds of trauma, like recent witnessing of war crimes, or environmental trauma, or current oppression from hostile governments, etc. Having these kinds of problems, clients often encounter one of two intrapsychic difficulties: either they are *too close* to the problem, thus

being overwhelmed by fear, sadness, aggression..., or they are *too distant* from the problem, usually by intellectualizing about it, or by becoming apathetic, or by developing physical symptoms that they can no longer link to a deeper meaning. *Too close/too distant* processes are the client's dimensions cutting across diagnostic categories of disorders (Gendlin, 1996). In this article I described clearing a space and finding the right distance, as remedies for clients that either fuse with overwhelming experiences or else feel nothing. These clients also usually need a therapeutic interaction in order to learn the necessary skills to make positive changes in their lives. The therapist interacts with the client in an attitude of acceptance and empathy. Gradually, in this corrective therapeutic milieu, the client learns to adopt a Focusing Attitude by interacting with the bodily felt experience (the client's inside) in a friendly and listening way. The therapist models the Focusing Attitude, honouring and trusting the wisdom that speaks through the client's body, stimulating the client to find the right symbolizations in which the bodily experience can move further into meaning. Finally, clients can practice Focusing on their own and become more and more their 'own therapist' by using this vital technique of self-exploration and self-discovery (Weiser Cornell, 1996).

Focusing-oriented work can complement each other method, because experiential understanding is more powerful and effective in achieving therapeutic results than working only on 'gut feelings' or 'intellectualizing'. Steps of actual change are to be found neither in mere emotional intensity nor in mere verbal discussion. The process of integration can be natural and fluid if clients are invited to recognize whether what they are saying matches what they are experiencing. This results in an increased awareness of self and an enhanced experiential understanding of the constellation of cognitive patterns and disorders that relate to particular problems. Adding Focusing suggestions may be totally consistent with the way many therapists are already working, or it may represent somewhat of a shift in attitude and language. The method is not dependent on which theory one chooses, nor on whether one uses verbal, body, imagery or interactional techniques, or even all of them, but on *how* one uses these (Leijssen, 2004).

An increase in internalization should not be seen as selfishly contemplating one's navel. On the contrary, it is a powerful source from which a person, purified and healed, may emerge feeling genuine concern about what others really need, and it may provide the vital force needed to devote oneself with increased dedication to one's fellow human beings. "The felt sense is implicitly contextual. It takes other people and the environment into account. It leads to larger and larger wholes." (Hinterkopf, 2005, p. 219). When a person starts from an inner centre, reaching out to others becomes more meaningful. Thanks to this inner anchorage others are no longer needed for security and to reduce fear, thus room becomes available for more healthy interpersonal relationships.

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1 I thank the client for giving permission for publication. Non-relevant data have been changed or left out to guarantee the client's anonymity.

2 I thank Jutta Schnellbacher (2005) for doing the interviews with the client and writing the transcripts.

MAKING PEACE FROM THE INSIDE

Rob Parker, Ph.D.

1. INTRODUCTION

It's 2:45, and school has just ended. A stream of teenage boys pours from the classroom; some running, others walking quietly in small groups, a few walking alone. Most are in their mid teens, but a 12-year-old is walking quietly by himself down the hallway. Suddenly, a muscular 15-year-old appears out of nowhere and slams the younger boy against the wall. Almost as quickly, three large men appear, separate the two boys, and lead them off in different directions. The younger boy is crying; the older boy loudly protesting his innocence, saying that the younger boy "was messing with me" and "I'll kill him if he tries it again."

It happens that the older boy, John (names and other details have been changed to protect confidentiality), frequently needs to "defend" himself from smaller and weaker children. But this is not his most serious problem. John is in an Alternative to Detention Program: like all of the boys in this school, John has committed an offense serious enough to merit approximately 2 years in juvenile detention, but instead he has been placed in a residential treatment program as an alternative to detention. Basically, the judge decided that his crime might have been related to emotional problems, and he should be given a chance to receive treatment instead of going to jail. The treatment program is intensive: milieu therapy 24/7, group therapy three times a week, individual therapy one to five times a week as needed. The staff are extremely talented and dedicated, and the boys are given ample opportunity to look at themselves in a supportive and caring environment. But they are also constantly held accountable for their choices. After trying this out for awhile, some boys decide that they don't want to work so hard, and would rather be in jail. And of course, those boys are given their wish. Anyone who is not benefiting from treatment, and especially anyone who is not at least trying, must be sent to juvenile detention. There are too many others who could benefit from treatment, but are going to jail instead.

For all of these reasons, the attack is even more serious than it might appear at first. Violence in this program is almost unheard of; and almost all of the incidents in the last 2½ years have involved John. Further, John refuses to be accountable for his behavior. In a program based on honesty, he makes up stories whenever he is confronted about his behavior, even if there are witnesses. When pressed, he creates ridiculous stories, for example that the younger boy was "messing" with him. In fact, he makes up stories even when it isn't necessary. He brags about exploits and accomplishments (which are clearly made up) to such an extent that his peers think he is strange, and avoid him. In group therapy, when his peers try to warn him that his behavior could send him back to jail, John says adamantly that he is not afraid of jail. In fact, he insists he is not afraid of anybody or anything, including death. He lies to himself, and lies to everyone around him.

The normal length of treatment is 18 months, but John has been in treatment for over two years, and he does not appear to be taking treatment seriously, nor does he appear to be

benefiting. And, he has been warned that he will be taken out of treatment and sent to jail if he continues getting in fights. Therefore, his attack on the younger boy is quite serious. It could be a turning point in John's life.

2. THERAPY

In therapy, it is the same thing. John insists that he is OK, and everybody else is messed up. John has no reason to change his behavior, and he is comfortable with any consequences, including death. There is nothing for him to talk about in therapy, because nothing bothers him. John has gone through several therapists, and no one has been able to reach him. His latest therapist reports that John is almost impossible to talk to, because he lies about everything. The therapist doesn't know what to do, and has asked me to see John.

As the clinical director of program, I must decide whether John can benefit from still more therapy. John has been in our program longer than anyone else and he has benefited less than anyone else. The staff have tried their best to help John, but they are frustrated, and annoyed with me for allowing him to stay and to continue disrupting our program. At times, even I am not sure why we are giving him so many chances. But I also know that in spite of his outward show of toughness, John could not survive in jail; and I sense, somewhere under the veneer of lies, a real person who desperately needs our help.

In addition to traumatizing others, John has been traumatized himself. As the saying goes, "hurt people hurt people." John grew up with domestic violence and long periods of emotional neglect. He lived in a dangerous, inner-city neighborhood, but as a child he played outside on the sidewalk to escape the violence and neglect at home. We suspect that he was frequently attacked by older boys, although it is difficult to be sure, because nothing John says can be trusted, and none of the adults in his life were paying attention. But John's body language speaks eloquently, that he is lonely and frightened, and has been all of his life.

John's life is like a stuck record. He keeps playing the same tune over and over again. However, as he gets older, this tune becomes increasingly dangerous for others and also for John. It is clear to everyone but him that his aggression and his lying, are going to stop very soon. The only question is whether it will stop because of therapeutic intervention in this program or lethal intervention in prison or on the street. John appears to be frozen, living in a way that is untenable, and yet unable to change. He has given us every reason to give up.

And yet something doesn't fit. Occasionally in group John shows considerable sensitivity, for example by helping another boy see how he is using anger to avoid dealing with a difficult issues. And when John describes how tough he is and how he isn't afraid of anything, there is a trace sadness in his voice, as if he doesn't really like what he was saying. In spite of all the problems, it feels like there is a person inside who wants to stop the violence and the lying; someone who wants help.

3. OLD ASSUMPTIONS

I began seeing John in early November. His previous therapist was at the end of her rope, and John was either getting therapy from me or going to jail. But John had already been

through several different kinds of therapy, with different clinicians. It was clearly time to stand back and rethink what we were doing. My own interest in psychotherapy has always overlapped with an interest in philosophy, but Gendlin's *Philosophy of the Implicit* has helped me understand my own assumptions in a new way.

All forms of psychotherapy involve assumptions, but usually these go unexamined. In order to do psychotherapy we must decide on some level what kind of therapy we are doing, and why. This involves more basic questions such as, What is therapy? And, because therapy is about people, we must also ask, What is a person? It can be useful to ask such questions, especially when therapy isn't going well.

Surprisingly, many apparently different schools of Western psychology share similar assumptions. These assumptions are quite basic; I didn't have to learn them in graduate school, because I had already absorbed them by growing up in a Western culture. Three key assumptions are, 1) that human personality or behavior is the result of *determinate entities* such as egos or schemas, 2) organized by *external relationships* such as scientific laws or theories, and 3) the entities and the relationships can be *described objectively*.

3.a) *Determinate entities*

Many psychological theories concern structures or processes such as drives, introjects, schemas, neuroanatomical structures, etc. Usually, these entities are assumed to be *determinate*, meaning that they have fixed identities. This assumption is essential in most theories, because without it we wouldn't be able to reliably identify what we are talking about, and the theory would be useless. However, necessary and sensible as this assumption is, it does not fit human experience very well. In fact, we think about experience in many, and contradictory, ways. Science is a good example of this; our understanding of gravity has gone through significant changes in the last 400 years, and it is questionable whether Copernicus, Newton, Einstein, and quantum physicists, were referring to a single determinate entity when they used the word "gravity". Similarly, various schools of psychology use very different entities to explain human behavior; there is continuing disagreement on what we mean by "personality" for example. Furthermore, we find that the meaning of specific terms such as "ego" often changes over time.

The assumption that human beings can be understood in terms of determinate entities is dubious at best. And yet, somehow the world has an order. Although our concepts (the determinate entities) change constantly, things continue to fall when we drop them, and people behave in ways that are ordered enough that we are able to live together. It is clear that there is an order to the universe, and that this order does not depend on our concepts about it.

3.b) *External relations*

Western science tends to look for causes; when someone gets sick, for example, we ask why, and we answer the question in terms of germs or some other cause. Psychology, modeled after the natural sciences, follows this pattern and assumes that behavior must have

causes. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a science that did not discuss causes. So it is almost second nature to ask what “makes” John lie so much.

But so far, causal explanations have not had the kind of success that would be necessary to place psychotherapy within the natural sciences, and the reasons may be fundamental. Cause and effect are examples of what Gendlin calls *external* relations. The cue ball hits the eight ball, causing it to roll into a pocket; but there is nothing intrinsic to the cue ball or the eight ball that made this happen. The relation of cause and effect came from outside.

By contrast, consider why you go to see a particular movie. The subject of the movie might interest you, but where did that interest come from? It might relate to books you’ve read, people you’ve known, issues in your life, experiences you had as a child. Many such factors might influence your decision to see the movie, but notice that their relations are internal: each one is meaningful in relation to all the others. Meaning is not made up of individual, determinate entities. Meaning is holistic. Everything is an aspect of everything else. And the relations are internal. The meanings of past experiences resonate with each other and with present experience and choices, in a way that is internal.

This is basic to human experiencing. Instead of external causes impinging from the outside, we experience ourselves as carrying-forward situations that are related internally, by their meaning to us. The reasons why I decide to write a paper, for example, could be multiplied endlessly, and stated in various ways (in other words, they are not objectively definable, determinate entities). But more than that, these reasons are internally related to each other, forming an intricate mesh or matrix of meaning, which is my reason for writing. For example, something my grandfather said to me when I was a child might interact with something I read in the newspaper last week, but the interaction is not causal in the sense of two chemicals interacting according to determinate scientific laws. Instead, my grandfather’s words and the newspaper article are internally meaningful in a way which I can feel, but can not completely specify with words. They don’t cause anything, but they resonate with each other in a way that changes each of them, and also influences my writing of the article.

3.c) Objective description

The assumptions of determinate entities and external causes both come from a more basic assumption, that knowledge is objective. This too, is a pervasive assumption in our culture. Scientific knowledge is supposed to be equally valid in all times and places, and verifiable by anyone who has proper training. Such objective knowledge cannot depend on any particular individual, with particular motivations and history. Instead, we create a kind of fictional “idealized observer” who is not influenced by culture, history, or personal motivations. Such an observer could then look at a universe that is objective, i.e., that does not include the observer (Webster defines the word “objective” as “independent of the mind”). The observer looks from the outside, making sense of everything, but the observer’s sense-making is itself not subject to causal explanation.

This creates a problem, because there is no idealized observer. All observers are real people and part of nature. When I was in grad school, one of my professors, a behaviorist,

asserted that all human behavior is a function of reinforcement. So I asked him, “what makes you say that?”, in other words, “are you saying that because it’s true, or because of your behavioral conditioning?” The fundamental problem was that his deterministic system couldn’t include him, because he had to be the “idealized observer” who stayed outside and made sense of everything. His solution to the problem was to ask me to leave his office. Gendlin’s solution is to develop better concepts, concepts which include us.

4. NEW THINKING

John, the living human being, is trapped inside our assumptions. We ask, “what is wrong with him?” assuming there must be a determinate answer. We ask, “why is he acting this way?” as if there were an external causal answer. And we want to provide some treatment to change him, as if he were something that we (idealized observers) could objectively understand and change. Meanwhile, John is not getting the help he needs. He stands to ruin his life, and the lives of many other people. We need to think about this in a new way.

Gendlin (1964, 1997) offers some useful ways to think about John. He does this by creating a model of living and of the human body, such that “one of them could be ours”. We leave behind the world where we are the observers of objective entities (egos, schemas, etc.) that are subject to outside forces (theories of development, of reinforcement, of psychopathology, etc.). We move into a world of experiencing, a world that includes us!

4.a) Life is ongoing process

Any summary of Gendlin’s model must necessarily be misleading because it must be couched in the old language which carries with it the old concepts and assumptions. For a fuller treatment, see Gendlin (1997).

Briefly, Gendlin understands life as process: living is an ongoing interaction between body and environment. The environment participates in this interaction as much as the body does. For example, lungs and air are both aspects of the single process of breathing. Gendlin means this in a very basic and literal way; for example, our breathing depends as much on a certain kind of atmosphere as it does on a certain bodily structure. Similarly, our eyes, our skeletons, our digestive systems, developed and now function as ongoing interaction with a particular kind of environment. If creatures from some distant solar system were able to study a single human body, they would be able to infer a great deal about planet Earth: its size, the composition of its atmosphere, the approximate temperature, its distance from the sun, the kinds of plants and animals that grow here, and so on. In this sense, we can say that the body IS the environment.

This means that human beings, including you and me, *are* ongoing interaction. We don’t exist separately from our environment and then start interacting with it. We *are* interaction between body and environment, so we (like all living things) are both body and environment. And for humans, the environment includes other people, language, and culture (although I am just making a bald assertion here, Gendlin, 1997, shows this in considerable detail). Thus, my language, culture, friends, family, and job, are as much a part of me as food or air.

4.b) Furthermore, living is more than just explicit structures; life is implying.

Living is more than determinate structures. Living process has a particular nature: it always implies a next step. At each moment, we are always in the middle of something that implies a next step, for example, breathing, finding food, eating, digesting food, interacting with others in various ways, or trying to understand Gendlin's philosophy.

But what is implied is not some determinate goal that could be specified by an observer. For example, hunger does not imply some determinate goal, such as a hamburger. Hunger implies something that will change hunger, so that we are not hungry anymore.

This is the meaning of *carrying forward*: the next step, the change implied by the living process, is whatever carries the process forward. But this implying (hunger) can be carried forward in many ways. We could eat in a nice restaurant or eat at home, we could eat snails or seaweed, we could receive intravenous feeding. It is not that hunger is vague or imprecise. In fact, the implying is extremely precise: some things will satisfy hunger, others won't, and our bodies are very clear about which is which. The implying is actually more precise than language and concepts. And if this is true for eating, it is even more true for social interactions.

This is one reason that traditional "objective" concepts fail when we apply them to living. Human experiencing has an extremely intricate internal order which is different from the external order imposed by the "idealized observer" and his/her "objective" concepts. Experiencing is an ongoing, meaningful process: the concrete world we live in implies all of the next steps we might take. Various objects (refrigerators, cars, trees) imply what we might do with them. Various people imply the relationships that we have or might have with them. And so on. Thus, just as our bodies imply a certain kind of environment, so also our language and behavior implies a certain kind of environment. All these implying functions together (they *even* and *focal*) in a single implying which is the ongoing "feel" we have for what comes next in this specific ongoing situation.

5. THE IMPLICIT INTRICACY

The process of living is a continuous carrying forward. At each moment, there are innumerable processes, each one "knowing" in some way how things are going, and each one implying a next step. All of the processes inform each other (*inter-affect*), so that a single next step is implied (*focaling*). If there is a loud noise, or if the lights go out, that changes the situation such that carrying-forward means finding out what is wrong, then maybe getting some water and then maybe finishing my thought. In other words, a situation has many implying functions, which inter-affect each other and focal into a next step. So, for example, as I write this, I might be thirsty, but I might also want to finish writing a thought before I get something to drink; so in this situation, carrying-forward might mean finishing this thought and then getting a drink of water.

Implying is rich and intricate in a way that defies linear logic. Consider the rich mesh of implying that focal into my wanting to drink water rather than something else: childhood experiences, many associations with water and other drinks, current availability of

different drinks, and much else. My body implies something that will quench thirst. My environment includes water, soft drinks, wine, milk, coffee, tea, etc. All of these will quench thirst, but there are other implyings being carried forward also. Water, for me, might imply purity, clarity, simplicity; memories of camping trips where we drank pure glacier water; times when the city flushes out the water mains and our water is rusty; and much else. Each of these implyings carries me forward in some ways and not in others; and each of these implyings also brings other implyings. For example, camping trips might imply freedom, self-reliance, independence. Each implying that we name, brings new ones, so that we could go on forever.

Furthermore, the total mesh of implying (the feel of what “all this” is like) is far more intricate than just a choice of water over something else. Consider just a few of the other implyings: wanting to finish a particular thought, or having that particular thought in the first place, or wanting to write an article, or being interested in philosophy and psychotherapy... Each of these implyings would lead in other directions, to more implyings. This intricate mesh of implying exists as a whole, with everything already in a meaningful relationship with everything else. Everything functions together, implicitly present in one explicit choice to drink water right now.

6. EVEVING

All of this can help us think about John in a new way. John’s living is an ongoing implying that carries forward in the best way possible in the situations he is experiencing. So, if we look closely at John’s language and behavior, we might be able to understand something about his world. But this understanding wouldn’t help us or him, because our concepts cannot capture the intricacy of this implying which “wants” to carry forward. Of course, John’s concepts cannot capture this intricacy, either; if they could, he would be carrying forward instead of being stuck. Gendlin’s philosophy also gives us new ways to think about this stuckness.

Have you ever noticed how memories come flooding back when you visit your old neighborhood? The very walls and streets seem to carry memories of that earlier time. It is the same with our internal neighborhoods. If we want to remember someone’s name, we think of the context in which we know that person: the job, shared acquaintances, things we have done together, etc. All of the meanings are implicit in each other, so the more we think of things that the imply that person’s name, the more the name is implied, until finally the implying carries forward when we remember the name.

The converse is also true. If we don’t think of things that imply the person’s name, we are likely to forget the name.

7. FROZEN WHOLES

Consider then, what happens if I had nearly drowned during a childhood camping trip. Camping might then imply something like extreme helplessness, fear, and need for safety.

Thinking about camping might make me feel very anxious; and thinking of things that imply camping might also make me feel anxious. I might avoid thinking about camping, and perhaps also avoid thinking of things that imply camping, such as camping equipment, wilderness, swimming, and so on. As I went down any of the myriad pathways toward meanings that imply camping, there would be a growing sense of danger and helplessness. Increasingly, I would feel a need for safety and control. Such an implying would be carried forward by thoughts and actions that create safety and control.

Camping and related meanings would tend to drop off of my map, not because I avoided them, but because I carried forward in different directions. So for a drink, I might choose coffee instead of water, especially if coffee implies something like hard work and competence. And I would do this without knowing why, precisely because I wouldn't be thinking about it.

I would then have what Gendlin calls a "*frozen whole*". In situations where something implies something which implies something which implies camping, I feel uncomfortable; and the feeling of discomfort increases the further I go down that path. Very quickly, I will feel danger and move toward safety. I won't experience much that relates to camping, because I am carrying forward in different directions.

As a result, my experiencing of those situations is very limited. I feel an implied need for safety, and I move toward safety. The usual rich intricacy of implying is not available to me in these situations, because I don't feel "into" them; I feel "away" from them. Other people would say that I have a stereotypical reaction to a range of similar situations. But my own experience would be that each situation implied danger, so I carried forward by doing something to make myself feel safer.

All of this is felt in the body. Living IS body-interacting-with-environment, and living process—including us—*feels* the ongoing interaction with the world in the process of carrying forward. Our bodies "know" what is implied, and whether what was implied actually occurred, whether or not we have the concepts to think about it.

Using the word "feel" in this particular way, we can think of carrying forward as an interaction between feeling and occurring which changes feeling. For example, if I stayed with the *feel* of camping, perhaps by focusing ("what is it like?"), or by actually going camping and noticing what it is like, I might experience the *feel* in its full intricacy, and that full intricacy might then change (would carry forward). But in this case, the feeling is frozen, because it never interacts with words or with actions. Nothing gets near it. It functions implicitly in the situation, but it, itself, never changes because it doesn't interact with anything.

This is somewhat similar to the traditional concept of "the unconscious" but it has some important differences. For example, we are not concerned with determinate contents that are repressed and stored somewhere. Just as hunger implies food (more exactly: whatever carries hunger forward), danger implies safety. So I want safety and I move toward safety. I am not repressing anything, and there is no censor keeping anything out of my conscious awareness. As Jerome Bruner observed in a different context, I don't need a filter to keep oranges out of my basket when I'm picking apples.

Experiencing is the issue. No interpretation or explanation will help, because I will hang onto the words and avoid the experiencing. Similarly, it might not help to actually go camping and relive the fear, because I might experience just the fear and not the camping.

A number of therapeutic approaches might be helpful here. For many years, it has been a puzzle that apparently different forms of therapy seem to be similar in their effectiveness. Now, a growing body of research suggests that therapeutic improvement correlates with experiencing level in many (perhaps all) effective therapies (Hendricks, 2002; Watson and Bedard, 2006). Instead of being swallowed up in re-living something, we can hold it in front of us (“oh, it’s that feeling again”) and very gradually interact with it (“what is this like?”). Although it appears that many therapies do this in some way, the therapist who is trained specifically in Focusing has some distinct advantages: when one understands the principle involved, one can do more of what is helpful, less of what is unhelpful, and one needn’t be limited to any specific technique.

8. RETURN TO JOHN

By the time we began individual therapy, I had been seeing John in group therapy for close to three years, so we knew each other well. Throughout group and individual sessions, he lied constantly, could admit no weaknesses, denied all feelings, and confabulated shamelessly when confronted. He did this with me, with other therapists, and with peers. He was desperately trying to live a lie, hopelessly out of touch with his own life. And he was dangerous, both himself and to others.

Danger implies steps toward safety, for therapists as well as for their clients. So, just as it was difficult for John to be open to the full intricacy of his situation, it was also difficult for me. I find it hard to trust the life-forward process of someone who has already hurt others, and who shows every indication of doing it again. Part of me wants to find safety in concepts and control. But if I had decided what was wrong with John, what needed to be fixed, I would have become an “idealized observer” who stood safely apart from him. By providing the “treatment” I thought he “needed,” I would have gained the illusion of control, I would have but lost the living human being.

And yet, therapy is very much about trust. Whatever implying lead John to carry forward in such a way, that implying was part of life. Ultimately, then, my decision was about whether to trust life; and the only possible answer was “yes!” This is what I love about therapy: There is always a moment when you have to put aside understanding, and trust life. Sometimes everything seems like it is about to fall apart and needs to be rescued; then trust is like bungee jumping. Other times, trust is a decision to go straight into the center of something scary, without trying to fix it, knowing that it will be okay. For me, this is the meaning of unconditional positive regard. Ultimately it’s a belief that life is bigger than we are, and has its own way forward.

I needed to be open to whatever John was experiencing, without prejudice, concepts or treatment plans. Especially because the standard approaches weren’t helping, I needed to learn from him.

When we started individual therapy, John already trusted me on some level. This was apparent in many small ways; for example, he listened to what I said in group and would sometimes say it back to someone else in a different context, in his own words. But his ongoing behavior problems made it clear that we were not connecting, so my initial goal was to listen more deeply, to learn as well as I could how he was experiencing the world.

For the first few sessions, I listened to many tall tales and unlikely excuses for problematic behavior. I listened seriously to John, the person, while sharing honestly but without challenge any difficulty I had believing specific things he was saying. In the atmosphere of trust we had already built, John was occasionally able to acknowledge some exaggerations. This was not totally new; over the previous two years, he had sometimes admitted lying when confronted with irrefutable evidence. But for us, right now, this felt important because we had traction: he was acknowledging something real.

We both needed to learn more about this “something real.” Somewhere there seemed to be an implying which wasn’t carrying forward because it wasn’t being experienced or acknowledged. We needed to learn more about what it was like to be John, and lying seemed like a good place to start. By this time, I was really curious to learn what sort of implying was carried forward by lies, especially when they were so spectacularly unsuccessful. To explore this, I gave him a homework assignment to write down a list of reasons why someone would lie (not why John would lie; that would be too threatening and would keep him from the actual experiencing).

In our next session, John produced a list of several reasons someone might lie: to feel strong, invulnerable, liked, etc. John seemed to be continuing to be honest and we were learning something about lying. But what was lying carrying him away from; could there be something he wasn’t experiencing, something frozen? John’s next homework assignment was to write down the opposite of each feeling he had listed.

He came back with a list that included feelings such as weak, vulnerable, disliked, etc. After we discussed these feelings, his next homework assignment was to write down what it would be like for another boy (not him) to experience all of those qualities (weak, vulnerable, disliked, etc.) But John didn’t need to do the homework. His answer was immediate: “That was my life earlier; it was horrible.”

This was remarkable. John had never before admitted anything like weakness or vulnerability. He went even further in our next session, and acknowledged that these feelings did not belong just to his earlier life, but were also an ongoing part of his current life.

An “objective observer,” perhaps a cognitive behaviorist, might have wanted to challenge either John’s basic belief that he was weak and vulnerable, or the apparent assumption that lying was a good way to deal with the problem. Or, a psychoanalytic “objective observer” might have explored past experiences that made him feel weak and vulnerable. But such approaches would have preempted John’s experiencing; they would have prevented him from experiencing and living the full intricacy that implied lying and that lying somehow carried forward. Somewhere there was a frozen implying which needed to be experienced and carried forward, not interpreted, corrected, or “understood.”

John was extremely unpopular among the other boys in our program; so I asked him gently, “What’s it like to be an unpopular kid who lies?”

John answered “It feels strange — you’re always second guessing, pretending to be someone else.” As we stayed with this, it became “scary, you don’t know who you are.”

This sounded like the beginning of a direct referent, so I asked, “Where do you feel that inside?”

John replied, “in my heart.”

“What name could you give to that place?”

“Pride, it’s defending me.”

“Can you go inside and ask your body what it wants?”

“It wants the truth!”

As we explored this, it became clear that his body wanted the truth even at the cost of public humiliation, “... because feelings come out.”

John described a war going on inside between “pride” and “feelings.” Pride was in his heart, and was concerned with what shows, with what is popular. Pride was hurt by public humiliation and wanted to protect him from that. The place he called “feelings” was in his stomach; he described it as “scarefull (sic), truth, unpopular, being you.”

So “pride” seemed to be a frozen structure, not a felt sense. “Pride” and “feelings” spoke clearly and articulately; there was no struggling to find words, no “murky zone.” Whenever a situation implied threat to “pride,” John responded in a stereotypical fashion without experiencing the full intricacy of the situation, such as how it feels to be lying all the time. “Feelings” seemed to be a handle for some of this intricacy, but it was not a direct referent, a sense of the whole situation.

The problem, then, was to bring aspects of the frozen structure into interaction with each other, and with other non-frozen aspects of his experiencing.

So I asked John to role-play a conversation between “feelings” and “pride”. Basically, pride (in the heart) said, “I protect you from abuse.” Feelings (in the stomach) said “It isn’t worth it to be pretending all the time, and not knowing who I am.”

John stopped the role-play and became very still for a moment. His next words seemed to come from deep within his body: “I have to make a decision: to live a lie or to live the truth.”

John’s expression and posture both shifted, exuding a calm groundedness that we had never seen before. As we ended the session, he commented that everything seemed unreal. I reassured him that this can happen when there are major shifts in experiencing, and promised to have staff keep an eye on him and also to be available if he needed me.

After this session, John’s behavior improved so suddenly and dramatically that a number of people remarked on it and wondered what had happened. But after about a week, we

came in one morning to find a message that John had attacked a peer the previous evening. The attack was brief, there were mitigating circumstances, and no one was hurt; but this looked like a relapse to the old behavior, and the end of John's tenure in our program. The clinical team met alone first, and then we asked John to come in and explain himself. We braced ourselves for the endless string of lies and confabulations: "I didn't do it, it was the other kid's fault, nothing happened, the staff was lying," and on, and on.

John knew that he might be going to jail, but he walked into the room calmly. Without any prompting beyond an initial question, he described clearly what he had done, took full responsibility without making excuses, and said that he would accept whatever consequence we thought was appropriate. You could almost hear people's jaws hitting the floor; this behavior had never been seen before in almost 3 years. John explained that it was a relief to be honest; no punishment was as bad as living a lie. He accepted a significant loss of privileges without comment, and expressed a resolve to continue being honest in the future.

After this incident, there were no more violent outbursts in our program, and John continued being honest and accountable for his behavior. After about 2½ months of near-perfect behavior, he was discharged to a lower level of care. He became an active member of a church youth group, and was eventually discharged home.

Of course, this was not the end of the story. When change happens quickly in this way, the new growth requires ongoing nurturing and support. John's problems were not over, but he had experienced a new way of living, and was no longer trapped in the old frozen patterns.

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FOCUSING: A Force for Growth and Healing

Agnes Rodríguez

I come from Perú, a beautiful land, but also a land of pain and fear. Even though I was born on the “sunny” side of Perú, I was never able to be indifferent to such an unjust society. That injustice enabled the eruption of the famous Shining Path guerillas and the spread of drug trafficking.

At the height of this convulsion in our society, my husband lost his job, our only source of our income. Even though I was already a licensed psychologist, I was devoted to the care of our four children, one of them disabled

God gives light in difficult moments so we decided to emigrate. I decided I could only take the two younger children with me, leaving my only daughter and the disabled child in the care of my mother. Tears come to my eyes when I remember this experience...

After a time in California, we landed in Costa Rica where my husband found a job in a pharmaceutical company. The other kids arrived safe and sound and we started a new life. It was like newly weds...but with four children already.

Focusing appeared in my life in 2002. I took a two-year training for Focusing Oriented Psychotherapists, with Changes groups, weekly partnerships, attending the excellent Changing the Unchangeable workshop and the 2004 International Conference. Much hope arose in my heart from these encounters and I decided to work for peace.

Now, two years later, I would like to share a transcript of a Focusing session that came at the end of an intense time of inner work. By sharing this, I want to show what Focusing has meant in my life. The series of sessions I experienced in the last few weeks were sometimes astonishing to me — as we never know where Focusing will take us. But I am sure that Focusing always moves us ahead...giving us steps to carry on...to fulfill our lives in a better and more gentle way...not forcing...but accepting...our own pace.

SYRUP

This morning I woke up early with a word in my mind: “syrup”. What does this word mean to me?

Syrup...a medicine to heal all wounds...This is Focusing to me...the syrup “para sanar todos los males”...to heal all malaise...in a sweet, tender way...But I feel a little bad talking about “my wounds”...it is not that I don’t want you to know about what has happened to me...I just feel...I am being unfair...with God...that has given me so much...I feel I am unfaithful ...and that makes me sad...

...There is a part of me telling that I am unfaithful towards life..."which has granted me everything"

...everything I need for living...

...But something has been growing inside of me lately ...something like a little tree...which wants the light...it comes up...slowly...but securely...looking for light...

...This is a new voice I am hearing...within myself...There are two voices inside of me...one tells me I should not be unfaithful ...The other one...tells me...I have a right to live...a right to have my own space...How should I make peace inside of me...?

...Two voices...telling me different things...it seems they collide...but, do they collide?...What do you need to feel better...? Try to sense into your body...I don't feel anything...just wait and see...

...Now I feel they do not collide...my need to live...to breathe...is the need to surmount my limitations ...Family limitations...and others...my disabled child...my demanding husband...the holes in my education...

...my menopause!!

...Now I sense relief...what a joy...!!

...I am looking at these limitations from another angle...they are...opportunities to grow...!!

... "Se volteó la tortilla!!"... "Things have changed to the opposite...!!" ... "Eso sí me gusta...!!! (I like that...!!!)... Qué bueno...!! (How good...!!)

...And I look at myself differently...I look inside me and I have an image of a little tree growing...in spite of the many limitations...the tree...keeps growing...searching for the light...keeps growing...searching for the light...

...The limitations...which seem to suffocate me sometimes...don't matter...The tree looks for air and warmth...

...the branches find their way...through the limitations.....and keep growing...

...Now I sense a lot of light...the branches have surmounted the limitations...a good time to breathe and keep warm!!

FINDING THE WORDS TO SAY IT: Searching for the Meaning in Life*

Mical Sikkema

De golven zijn de dagen	The waves are the days,
De dagen van het jaar	The days of the year
Het lijkt of ze vertellen	It seems as if they tell
Hoe het ons vergaat	What will become of us

Maar de onderstroom	But the undercurrent
Die niemand ziet	That no one sees
Bepaalt de richting	Defines the direction
Op elk gebied	in every domain

Stef Bos

Stef Bos

“It lives!”

— Chinese Ch’an master in response to the question: what is Zen?

There is a lone white rose in a vase on the table. In five minutes my client will call me from America, and yet I sit here at the computer still searching for an entryway into the paper that I want to write. Into this subject that reaches its hands out to me and implores me to stay with what is stirring, with what its gesture expresses, until the right words have the room, time and grace to arrive. The grace to emerge says it better.

But here, then, it becomes clear that I have already begun. That *this* is a beginning. Writing about my search for how to begin. Being with the situation as far as it has emerged until now. And staying with the question implicit in the outstretched hands...a gesture that both beseeches and offers...and the longing within that question. I need to attend to what is being offered, implicitly present and precisely felt, though little of its substance is yet formed into words. At this moment, the longing and its gesture say, in fact, all that there is to say: the longing and its question hold the answer in their hands.

This presentation is about my confrontation with the question: ‘What is the value of living?’ which became my immediate and constant companion after my husband’s unexpected death nearly three years ago. And it is about the role that the process of *Focusing* and translating a book of Buddhist teachings, or Zen talks, has played in bringing me to an unexpected, radically experiential answer.

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Early in my development as a psychotherapist, I was introduced to the work of the American philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin. Since then, Gendlin's process of *Focusing* has been at the core of my work as a psychotherapist. More fundamentally, it has come, irrevocably, to influence every aspect of my life. The growing familiarity through the years of attending to certain clues, asking certain questions and then listening and waiting for what arises in response, has formed itself into what feels like another sense organ within me.

Gendlin's discerning and making explicit what he calls the *felt sense*, or experiential *direct referent*, has made possible a structured way of noticing and dialoguing with each moment of living, and the whole of my feelings, thoughts, and not-yet-differentiated experiencing. Gendlin observed what he later called the *felt sense* during the historical research that he and Carl Rogers conducted into what makes change in psychotherapy possible.

Gendlin found that for those who could sit silently and attend to their bodily felt experience of a problem or unclear situation, something new opened up into a concretely felt *shift*, out of which further insight emerged. Through attending to what was felt but not yet known, both their bodily experiencing of the situation and their understanding of it changed, and brought them into a new relationship with the problem, as well as to its solution. Gendlin identified and articulated six steps to facilitate this process, and *Focusing* was born.

Focusing is like the proverbial finger pointing to the moon. The moon in this case is our murky, but distinct bodily felt experiencing of our lives, which always includes far more than our thoughts or emotions. We are all, at least at certain times in our lives, aware of the vague, yet absolutely precise bodily sense of a something we know and feel, but cannot yet find the words for. This is the realm of the *felt sense*. By developing *Focusing*, Gendlin made this realm of awareness accessible even to those unfamiliar with it.

There is hardly anything that I do now without *Focusing*. Through the practice of 25 years, my intimacy with that in-between realm of *felt sensing* has become as natural as seeing, hearing and smelling. All of my work as a therapist and supervisor is rooted in attending to felt experiencing, as is everything else in my life, from brushing my teeth or bicycling to the market, to talking with friends or listening to music. But it was not always so.

My basic character is that of a strong-willed, passionate person, uncompromisingly determined to find, and have, my own way. This stubbornness was only made stronger by a culture of family and ethnicity that emphasized doubt and vigilance, and fostered a fundamental anxiety about being excluded or neglected that ran, like blood, through my veins. Yet I felt a determination and longing to sculpt my own life. This invited a dogged tunnel vision, along with overly dramatic attempts to influence circumstances, control situations and persuade people to go along with my vision of what must happen. Although I developed more flexibility and patience in my late 30's and 40's, these did not exactly come as second nature. My longings were intense and often brooked no compromise, I had to have what I had to have, and did not handle delays or disappointments, not to mention failures, easily.

Nevertheless, something in Gendlin's manner of working, with its roots in client-centered therapy, spoke to me. I trained with *Focusing*-oriented supervisors and co-led *Focusing* workshops. My capacity for patience and empathy broadened and deepened. But my characteristic stance in life remained, at some fundamental level, largely untouched.

In the spring of 1997 I was in a very precarious state. The recent divorce from my husband of nearly 18 years was as essential to my further development as it was devastating to my sense of stability and the life that I had led for so long. I seriously considered suicide as a solution to the terror of being alone and having no sense of solid ground under my feet. I understood the super-cooled rage that can make death seem like just one of many logical choices. It was, to put it mildly, a very rocky time.

I decided to go to the International Focusing Conference in Germany, to see colleagues and friends. The first evening, I met Bob Sikkema, a psychotherapist from The Netherlands. The word that most precisely describes my experience of that first meeting is recognition. I recognized Bob. I had never met him before, nor did he resemble anyone I knew, nor am I alluding to a 'past life.' The exact words for what I felt when I first met his gaze were not 'love at first sight.' But rather, they were words rumbling up from some previously unknown depth in me, in recognition of one I had long been searching for. They were: 'Oh, it's *you*.' And with them came a felt *shift* that moved through me like a quiet tidal wave of awakening.

Bob and I began calling and then corresponding and visiting each other with increasing frequency. I approached the relationship with my characteristic single-mindedness, but quickly discovered that it was beyond my control. Bob refused to be forced into moving more quickly than fit for him, while remaining unfailingly present in his attentions. I wanted him to see, right away, that we could make a life together. He said that it seemed to be developing in that direction, but wasn't there yet. His pace, slow and deliberate, held my feet to the fire of the agony of uncertainty, and I questioned staying in the relationship more than once. But I could not escape a deeper knowing that responded with: 'You must see this situation through, whatever the outcome.' Thus, I was left with doing what was hardest for me: being patient and waiting.

Bob and I co-led *Focusing* workshops in Seattle. We talked 2 or 3 hours every day on the phone. My agonizing did not abate, but through grace and the support of friends, I bore what seemed impossible to bear...and 2½ years after we had met, Bob and I were married. Four months later, I closed my therapy practice of 18 years, sold my house, and moved to The Netherlands.

I was 48 years old, had never lived abroad nor spoken any language but English. I began to study Dutch and acclimate to my new home. I felt no embarrassment in revealing my lack of facility with the language, speaking it as much as I could, and my determination bore fruit. I was fascinated with learning Dutch, and with the unexpected insights that came to me about English and language in general. I insisted on trying to speak and write about the same things in Dutch as I would in English, with the same depth and complexity. And while impossible, with predictable, often humorous, results, this effort helped my progress enormously.

The life Bob and I shaped together far surpassed what either of us had ever experienced. We realized that we had each crossed a threshold of change, that we completed something in each other and belonged together. We enjoyed speaking of growing old together.

On Sunday, August 25, 2002, Bob awoke in terrible pain. The doctor he eventually allowed me to call came and ordered an ambulance to take him to the hospital. At the end of that week, Bob emerged from a second exploratory operation in a medically-induced sleep. I spent every possible minute with him, talking and singing to him, massaging his motionless body and praying. Precisely four weeks after he had entered the hospital, I stood with Bob's son and our 5 dearest friends in a semi-circle around his bed, and struck his meditation sound-bowl three times as the doctor turned off the breathing apparatus keeping him alive. I leaned over him, repeating that our love would always be with him, until it was clear that he was dead. I stood there, empty and defeated. I had held onto Bob with all of my strength, with every ounce of my being, but Death had made it clear that his life had not been in my hands. It felt as if I'd been shoved right through a solid brick wall.

Just months later, I found part-time work in my field, and the concrete details of my life began to assume a kind of normalcy. But I was in a strange state for which I could find no good words. On one level, I was adjusting to everyday life, while on another, I had been shoved into an entirely new land, into another world. In one moment, the familiar had become alien and even what was yet recognizable had an oddness about it. The words of my vocabulary in English as well as in Dutch seemed strange and unsuitable for this new place, at least as I had formerly used them. Yet, there was also nothing more important than finding the right words to express what was happening, to describe the violence of coming through that wall and being shattered completely, while, at the same time, emerging on the other side in one piece and having to continue on.

Meanwhile, I was also trying to do the impossible with words: to bridge the distance between me and Bob, between this world of living and whatever that 'other side' was. I filled notepads with my feelings, questions for and thoughts about Bob. The words flowed out in English as well as in Dutch, often switching several times in one sentence. And underneath them all ran the current of that one unrelenting question: "And what, *now*, is the value of living?"

I knew that suicide was no longer an option. The felt sense that had brought me into relationship with Bob and our marriage *now* made it just as clear that I must 'see *this* through,' '*this*' meaning, *life*, and I could not turn away from it, even though I could embrace it only in the most reluctant of ways. I also knew that Bob had loved life. He wanted to live to be 400. Turning my back on life would feel like turning my back on him.

Nevertheless, I felt a decided, yet subtle detachment from much of ordinary life, although not at all depressed. I was easily touched, especially in my contacts with people, and also easily moved by the beauty, meaning, suffering and love present in the most everyday things. I also felt joy and immeasurable gratitude for the nearly 5½ years Bob and I had had with each other in this life.

The detachment had more to do with a fineness of discernment than with shutting down: it was a filter through which what was vital, what truly needed my attention, was revealed. I didn't feel any animosity toward those around me buying new things, seeking entertainment or going on vacation, but these held little interest for me. I felt neither happiness nor unhappiness about being alive, but a kind of acknowledgement bordering on

resignation that living beyond Bob's death was what I had been given to do. I didn't know 'why' this was so, and *that* had my attention. The answer to *that* question became vital to discover. But how?

In the fall of 2003, I attended a Zen day led by the Dutch Buddhist teacher Ton Lathouwers, who Bob had introduced me to. Ton and I stood talking at the day's end and the question arose of whether I had the time and interest to try translating some of his writing into English. Despite my far from fluent Dutch, my immediate response was an unqualified 'yes!' As a trial, I would translate one chapter of Ton's book *Meer dan een mens kan doen*, or *More than anyone can do*.

I had read it earlier, when all I could make out, with my limited Dutch, was its larger rhythms and themes. I felt inspired, comforted and challenged by what I *had* understood, but I longed to be touched by the nuance of the words, while knowing that that was beyond me. However, when Bob and I talked about the book, and about other teishos we had heard firsthand, it also was clear that I intuitively understood far more than I could linguistically follow. After Bob died, I went to sesshins more frequently and thus grew increasingly familiar with the themes of Ton's teachings. My improving Dutch made it easier, and I discovered that many of his ideas were not wholly new to me, although I had never studied Buddhism.

In the secularized Jewish family in which I grew up, God had no place. There was no room for thoughts, feelings and beliefs pointing to the possibility of a context of meaning wider than the strange, truncated boundaries of human life. Nevertheless, I possessed a longing to reach beyond those confines. I explored ideas, both philosophical and spiritual, in search of a frame of reference that would give me the answers to such questions as: 'what is the meaning and value of life?', 'why are we here?', 'why do we suffer?', 'who am I?', and 'what am I meant to do?' But, I always felt constrained when confronted with the step of taking on a particular set of beliefs. I seemed unable to let go of my unremitting sense of doubt and commit myself to a religion or path of devotion. In the end, uncertainty always intervened and left me with no other choice than to reject each way as unconvincing. At the same time, each disappointment only seemed to strengthen my determination to keep on searching.

Yet, it is impossible to compare my search *before* Bob's death with what it became *after* he died. Being pushed through that brick wall changed everything. The existential quest running like an underground spring through my life, had quickened overnight, into a deep river, flowing sure and wide. 'Why am I here?' and 'what is this about?' became as everyday as 'what do I want to eat?' and 'do I need gas in the car?' This quest, fueled by the grief of losing Bob and my love for him, had taken over my life. Everything else felt superfluous by comparison.

From the moment I started translating Ton's book, I knew that I would not stop until I was done, regardless of the fate of the completed manuscript. This was a task tailor-made for me, as it required an extraordinarily intimate encounter with the issues of life/death, faith/doubt, certainty/uncertainty, suffering, compassion and love — in fact, the very issues that commanded nearly all of my attention. The river of my own quest had converged with that of the quest for precisely the right English words to express Ton's Dutch, and left no

room for doubt that this task was needed for my development and well-being, as well as, perhaps, my sanity. I also knew that I had to do it for Bob. The possibility that Ton might benefit from it as well was just icing on the cake.

Zen is a way of paradox, of facing the irreconcilable opposites that nevertheless occupy the same spaces in life. The Zen koan, an impossible question given to the student as a concentration point for meditation, epitomizes this. It calls the meditator to inhabit a 'field of tension' until it breaks open to reveal the wholeness which the impossibility has concealed. Sitting with the not-knowing of how the koan can be resolved breaks open, revealing a space as wide as eternity, where the impossibility of a solution becomes liberating, as it reveals the paradoxical nature of existence. Thus, Zen is a way of facing and directly experiencing that we don't, and can't, explain the deepest mysteries of existence, but that we can come to know them in an intimate way.

From the moment of Bob's death, I struggled with the question of what had happened to him. Of what death meant...for him, for me, for our relationship. Was he totally gone, without leaving a trace in the cosmos? Or was he still present in another way or form? Right after he died, I certainly felt connected with him. Thereafter, the sense of his presence was vague and changeable, but I knew that it didn't fit to say that he was *not* in consciousness, either. Additionally, I knew that the intensity of my wish to believe in his continued existence could only muddy my ability to feel into the situation without bias. I wanted to know, one way or the other, and I still want to know the answer to the riddle: Bob is dead and Bob is present.

In his *teishos*, or Zen talks, ten of which comprise his book, Ton Lathouwers reminds us again and again that compassion — the meeting from heart-to-heart — and faith are the very crux of the Buddha's teachings. A professor emeritus of Russian literature at Leuven University in Belgium, Ton often refers to Dostoyevsky, along with many of the atheistic Soviet authors who are his particular specialty. With these, and classical texts from all currents of Buddhism, along with other sources as varied as Søren Kierkegaard, Elie Wiesel, Julian of Norwich, Antoine St.-Exupery and pop singer Van Morrison, he offers his always tentative, yet unwaveringly optimistic message to those who will listen.

Perhaps I felt at home with Ton's teachings, even when I could understand only the most basic thread running through them, because of the respect, fearlessness and love with which he spoke of not-knowing as an inescapable aspect of unadorned, un-romanticized human experience. He knew doubt and despair, as well as faith and hope, intimately. And he spoke, again and again, on behalf of a faith that is not threatened by doubt, and that encompasses the possibility of going beyond the beyond:

“...here faith and doubt keep each other going. In the Zen tradition that is called: the great doubt. That great doubt is actually one of the basic demands of the Zen tradition, next to and together with a great faith and a great commitment.

Fundamental doubt about everything that happens to you. Fundamentally not knowing and, at the same time, being challenged to give your unique answer

from there. To give your own inalienable expression to that. Existence is a mystery, an enigma. It is: not knowing. It descends upon you as an enormous question. And challenges you to offer up your own completely unique answer. Not theoretical, not prepared, but through your life itself.”

Here was a faith asking me to bear the not-knowing, and to hold myself open for an experience that reaches far past intellectual proof to touch the unshakeable knowing of the heart and remain open to the possibility, even while shaking in my boots, that the impossible is, nonetheless, possible. Here I found room for my grief and despair, as well as for my longing for a first-hand experience of faith. It had never made sense to me that things ‘just happen’ randomly, but I was always stopped short by not being able to prove one explanation over another. Here was a challenge to look beyond the horizon of all such explanations, and to listen to my heart and the knowing there, without reservation, that this marriage with Bob, this love of ours, transcended our separation through his death. To take seriously the longing to understand this knowing, even without being able to know what this might mean in actual, concrete terms. My heart could not predict the future, but it knew, better than anyone or anything else could, what was most important to me. The resulting, unanswerable, questions: Is Bob in consciousness? Is there existence of some sort after death? Will I ever see him again? flowed through me like the swift, interwoven currents of a river finding its way to the sea. Within Ton’s words, I found form and structure, without rigidity or doctrine. A message based on existential process and not on bowing to certain beliefs or explanations. That was such a relief.

Searching for the words to translate Ton’s text was, then, also my search for the meaning and value in my life as a whole, and the words to make these things explicit. Translating the text was one immense *Focusing* process on two levels. As I sat with the Dutch lines, waiting for the right English words to make themselves known, I reached as deeply into my felt sense of their meaning and their intention, as into my dictionary and thesaurus. This was slow and painstaking work — emotionally and linguistically draining. Emotionally and existentially demanding because the grief over Bob’s death and feeling lost in this new landscape of life, formed the atmosphere of my translation work, and of my life as a whole. Through translating Ton’s teishos, I hoped to find my way into feeling less lost, as well as into an experience of faith. I longed to understand how to live further, in the spirit and grace of undying love.

Writing this paper was not unlike the process of translation, although also different in nature; for the experience I sought to put on paper, and the words to describe it, were all my own. I was translating my not-yet-articulated experience from felt sense into words. Two-thirds of the way through, I felt increasingly overwhelmed by the task I had undertaken, as it threatened to disassemble into chaos. The more I tried to write, the more the story as a whole seemed to unravel. After receiving some deeply appreciated feedback, I took a scalpel to those passages of confusion, cutting them all away. Once I reread what was left, I could see that all the deletions had been things I had felt that I *should* include: the references to other writers, to the theoretical and philosophical. For, when I first contemplated this presentation, I imagined drawing on others who had written of their experience of translating and how it

had personally affected them. But, the few texts I could find, including Eva Hoffman's well-known *Lost in translation*, focused mainly on the difficulty the authors had moving from one culture and language to another. . . .and on the profound and lingering sense of loss and alienation that leaving their mother tongue behind brought, as they made their way in their new land. There, I found little resonance, at least in relation to what I felt I wanted to say here. And, the same was true for Marie Cardinal's *The words to say it* as well as Gene Gendlin's philosophy of the implicit. But, I had taken for granted that a presentation must include these things, mustn't it? That had been my assumption. Yet something was clearly wrong. By clearing out the words that did not resonate with what inside of me was still seeking expression, I found my way back to the gesture of the outstretched hands, to *Focusing*, and thus to the possibility of moving beyond assumptions to sit quietly with the felt sense of what I still wanted to say. And then, I knew where my next step lay. In letting this reconnection with that gesture, and with myself, show me the way.

By the time I finished translating Ton's book, I became aware that my relationship with my original question, and the gesture of its longing, had shifted. My fundamental way of being in and moving through life had changed. I had come to recognize the land of not-knowing, on the other side of that brick wall, as my new dwelling place. The answer to my question revealed itself as the question itself.

To dwell within the question, 'what is the value of living,' means meeting each person, each moment, each situation, without already knowing what they are, what they mean or what is needed. This is the attending to what is unclear that *Focusing* facilitates. It is the openness of sitting in *zazen*, as well as the translation process in which I engaged to find the English translation for Ton Lathouwers' words. It is also the only way to ask a question for which you already know there is no answer, at least in the ordinary sense. It means entering into an intimate relationship with the unknown, the unclear, even the impossible. . . .with simple curiosity or with a deep, urgent longing to find a way through the confusion, pain, sorrow, impasse to understanding and perhaps even grace. Ultimately, it means a way of living, each day, indeed each moment, with the guiding questions of 'What is here for me to do?' 'What is being asked of me?' and 'Where is the step I am being called to take?'

Around the same time as I began this paper, I became hooked on an American television program broadcast in The Netherlands, *Joan of Arcadia*. The protagonist is a student at Arcadia High School, and as the title might suggest, she has been singled out by God for attention. In the program, God appears to her in many guises, from a punk-rocker to a construction worker, changing age, gender, and ethnicity. Having missed the first show, I don't know how Joan's apprenticeship with God began, but she takes the exercises she is given seriously, even if reluctantly and sometimes not without a hefty argument. The assignments are often cryptic, like the koans of Zen. Joan is challenged to find out what is being asked of her, and what the fulfillment of her task is, without settling necessarily on the first understanding of the exercise or the first solution she can find.

It took me a while to realize that my kinship with Joan comes through my sense that she has also found her way into the land of not-knowing, perhaps also not exactly by choice. And although she struggles each time, reaching for ready solutions to her assignments, it is

when she can bear the unclearness and uncertainty of not-knowing and attend to the call and wisdom of her own heart that she finds a way through and completes her given task. In her, I have found an unlikely ally. I feel less estranged in the world.

And as I type these last words, I see my husband Bob smile at me and nod, how and from where I do not know. And I know that I am ready to leave this as it is, in your hands, with just a few words, from Ralph Waldo Emerson, in closing:

“I have more experience than I have written here, more than I will, more than I can write. In silence we must wrap much of our life, because it is too fine for speech, because also we cannot explain it to others, and because somewhat we cannot yet understand.”

SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS

Knowing how to Focus...how to be with myself in a ‘Focusing way’...made something extraordinary possible, as I struggled to come to terms with Bob’s death. Once and for all even the most subtle and disguised forms of the myth that life is either knowable or controllable lay in ashes and dust at my feet. But, mixed in with those ashes lay my familiar ways of responding to fear, of trying to pre-empt it through strategy and control or trying to outwit it, which had also been reduced to dust.

Being able to make space for my felt experiencing meant that I could bear witness to not only everything happening moment to moment, but also to what arose in me, in response to it all.

Bob’s death taught me that there was simply no point to trying to turn away or hide from whatever life would bring to me. Having Focusing rooted so deeply within me called me and allowed me to relate to the irrevocable, unwanted, devastating experience of losing Bob with attention, alertness and an open heart. I found myself making a previously indistinguishable discernment between the (ever-continuing) flow of ‘normal’ emotions and feelings, including fear, and existential fear. By existential fear, I mean the terror which arises whenever consciousness of the fundamental uncertainty and inescapable mortality of our humanness breaches the bulwark of our attempts to deny or escape it. The fear that underlies any belief that facing what is beyond this bulwark, all that is unexplainable and mysterious in our existence, is more than can be borne.

Perhaps knowing in every cell of my body that everyone had done everything possible to save Bob’s life, and seeing that this was still not enough to keep him from dying, brought me face to face with the nakedness of human fallibility. It brought me to my knees, and also filled me, unexpectedly, with a strange sense of grace and peace much deeper than any ‘emotion.’

I knew my smallness in the face of the infinite, my fragility as well as my strength, and realized that very little of any of this had anything to do with me ‘doing’ anything, or being responsible for creating these conditions. Yet, at the very same time, I saw clearly that

doing all I could, absolutely all and everything, until there was nothing left to try, was and is the only true task — to live this life to the fullest extent of its meaning, whatever life asks of me.

To put it another way: After Bob's death, I was no longer afraid of feeling fear, or anything else, for that matter. Whatever comes up, as awful and painful as it is, I know that my task is to live it through, and mine it for all that it has to offer . . . as openly and receptively as possible. The purpose of life is clearly to be discovered in and through the living of it.

Focusing gave me a way, and thus the courage, to meet and bear the unbearable moments of Bob's illness and death and living on after his death. To not shrink back from myself, but instead to remain true to myself and my inner process, even in the direst of times. Focusing gave me a way of holding onto myself, bringing me back again and again to the felt sense of the situation, the point of reference within when there was no other elsewhere to guide me. And Focusing has helped me to continue looking life in the eyes...with the unconditional and all-inclusive gaze of one who is looking through the eyes of her heart and dares to see it all — to meet and respond to each moment, whatever it contains.

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INTO THE FEAR-FACTORY: Treating Children of Trauma with Body Maps

Bart Santen

“Much time passes by before what has been vanished is laid bare again. Traces are left in the records, but you don’t know where they are hidden and by whom they are guarded, and if those guards will agree to show them to you. They might have forgotten the whole existence of those records. You only need a bit of patience.”

— *Patrick Modiano*

1. INTRODUCTION

Children of trauma — those who score high on dissociation scales — can be governed by free-floating anxiety. In the words of Swedish novelist Stig Dagerman (1995), they “carry their fear with them the way one carries a beginning fever, without knowing exactly what is going on.”

Philip, 12 years old, talking from a low level of experiencing once introduced the following metaphor to describe the mechanism of how he felt that his free-floating anxiety had originated, and how it was produced and maintained inside. “The brain-cutter”, he pointed out, “is a big fear-factory with 11 fear-machines. The fear-machines must prevent that memories will come out. The fear-machines tick, and then the fear is coming out.”

Traumatized children like Philip protect themselves with a fear-loaded “fever” that keeps them deadlocked and structure-bound. Fear-inducing mechanisms obtrude at the expense of the person’s ability to sense. The method introduced here, based mainly on the findings of Eugene Gendlin, can be used as an additional tool to help these children unlock these mechanisms.

Gendlin’s thinking about experiencing and focusing — the motor of psychotherapy — (Gendlin, 1962, 1964, 1981, 1996, 2003) has always guided me in my work as a psychotherapist. I applied his notions to child and adolescent therapy and succeeded in helping many traumatized children to improve their focusing ability (Santen, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1999). But when I worked with dissociated children like Philip, caught up in such extremely pervasive fear, I felt the need to develop new tools. As usual, I approached these frightened children with a client-centered listening attitude and tried to provide a safe and steady presence. I tried to enable them by means of play and focusing-oriented tools like drawing and guided imagery to make space and discover the directly sensed difference between what appeared to be their person underneath and their interfering inner tendencies. However, the fear of these children was so dense that in too many cases it acted like a fog that does not dissipate. I wondered if

the impact of what Philip called “fear-factories” could be approached differently. Maybe a handle could be found that would enable these children to get their “brain-cutting” phenomena more sharply in focus; that would help them to master these fear-generating mechanisms; and that would help them to regain control of the “I” and reconstitute experiencing.

The children we talk about walk in the fog of their fear. Their inner unrest is tangible. They are stuck in what Gendlin calls “a painful mass of confusion and tightness”; they talk all the time, either out loud or to themselves inside as they do not feel anything directly. In order to focus it would be necessary for them to be assisted more effectively “to keep quiet, not only outwardly, but also not to talk inside, so that a feeling place can form” (Gendlin, 1974).

My experience was and is that it can be very hard for dissociated children to connect with a feeling place; their bodies do not “talk back” easily. It is difficult to reach and maintain the required quiet inner sensing. When there is such fear-driven inner unrest going on it obscures awareness. If I wanted to help these children reconnect it would be necessary to make tangible for them the whole spectrum of their bodily dissociation. Maybe I could find a way to help them visualize the spatiality and dynamics of these dissociation-linked phenomena. Such clarification might dissolve the structure bound circles of their current way of being and restore their ability to process experience.

It seemed important to tune in to the spatial aspect of dissociation. Many dissociated clients have attributed fixed spatial positions to dissociation-linked phenomena. Commenting on the ‘hallucinatory voices’ of some of his patients, Janet (1901) wrote that they sensed these phenomena through their muscular sense before they pronounced them, and “they figure that they are hearing a strange voice localized in this or that place.” Patients interviewed by Leudar & Thomas (2000), talking about voices in their heads, “claimed they could localize different voices to left and right sides.” Some years ago a woman responded to one of my presentations about focusing with dissociated adolescents and revealed she struggled herself with such phenomena. She confirmed that it was also her experience that there is a geographical aspect involved in dissociation:

“I would have these internal maps”, she said. “There would be a location for the alter kind of places, sometimes here...here...here. First there would be a location I knew I didn’t want to go, an empty rump I knew I was avoiding. For me it was something like lower left. Sometimes I would think of an intermittent of the brain quadrants. It wasn’t like there was even anything there. Knowing that I was avoiding that would be a clue that there was a place to go because I am not going there.” Talking about therapeutic possibilities in such a situation, she stressed: “That the in-here exists out-there is really helpful.”

Bringing these elements together, I looked for a framework that would be strong enough to counteract the fog and secure resonance with the body. A design, derived from Gendlin’s method of “Clearing a Space” that could create an inevitable out-there reflecting and clarifying the dynamics of the experienced reality of the in-here.

“Clearing a Space”, the first part of focusing-instructions (Gendlin, 1979, 1996, 2003) invites a friendly attitude towards all that can be found inside. This process of clearing space is the inner act of distancing yourself neutrally from what troubles you while you still keep it

before you. This can be done by sorting out each of the problems that the body carries. The focuser is invited to put each problem down and let it wait in an imaginary space of its own. Thereafter, one of those problems can be chosen. It can be approached from a separate standpoint (you are here and “it” is there) and can become sensed as a whole. This constitutes the entrance point to next steps in the focusing process. Frozen experience turns into a self-propelled feeling process.

When I read Gendlin’s specifics on teaching focusing (Gendlin, 1979) it struck me how indispensable bodily resonance is and how easily this can be obscured. When someone attends to the middle of the body, clearing a space or getting a felt sense, quick answers from the mind may pop up and obscure direct reference. Gendlin would remind the client of that possibility and advise him/her just to let it pass. He describes how self-critical mental activities can cause confusion by commenting and dumping feelings on top of other (felt sense related) feelings. This should be countered in favor of the small still awareness (felt sense) hidden underneath. Although the impact of these obscuring forces in dissociated children is very strong, a proper use of the dimension of space possibly could enfeeble these repressive tendencies. These children might disassociate sufficiently from their state of dissociation to unlock their body and speak. “When a problem (in this case: the sum of dissociation-linked phenomena; B.S.) does allow itself to be placed in a space made for it, there is a change in the body, something like a felt shift (...) It is very helpful (to) let the body live without (that problem).” (Gendlin, 1979).

To sum up: in the design I needed, bodily resonance should be secured; an especially powerful way of space-making should counter the blurring activity of obscuring phenomena. This design should make it possible to visually place and keep the present fear-inducing triggers at an imaginary distance. If successful this would create an inner space in which the children’s “I” would emerge — not overwhelmed by the fears and accompanying memories — that would support a safe place to process experience.

It is important to make avoided (trigger) places “exist” in an out-there space (outside the body) to function as a doorway to access these places in the in-here space (inside the body). These in-here spaces, situated in specific locations in the internal landscape of the body, should be approximated in a bearable way. These children should be guided step-by-step to begin to dare/bear to arrive in this new inside place; subsequently to dare/bear staying connected and sensing the body talking back, to clarify what the body knows. The creation of a demarcated container should channel this travelling (separated from the infinite space) into the as yet avoided direction; subsequently, a magnifying glass approach should help the step-by-step process of entering the avoided place. The question remained: how exactly to realize this.

Shirar (1966) and Stone & Winkelman (1985) provided the pieces I was missing. Shirar treated dissociated children by using a sketch of the outline of a body. She asked each of them to draw on that body how he/she would divide it for his/her alternate personalities to inhabit it (e.g. split it up into 26 apartments, each inhabited by one of 26 alters). Shirar used these drawings to initiate a cognitive process. ‘A body on paper’, I guessed, could be used as a container for the experiential process we were looking for as well. I realized how this could be tried when I read Stone & Winkelman, who asserted: “Each sub-personality brings its own energies in our body. We can feel them inside.” The plausibility of this assertion made it seem worth trying.

Thus I began to offer dissociated children 8 to 18 years old life-sized empty ‘bodies’ drawn on paper. These could be used as out-there containers that, functioning as reflectors, could stir up and clarify the current spatially distributed dissociation-linked mechanisms in their body, in order to release, by “touching it over and over”, the ability to reconnect with the middle of the body, to unchain the locks, and reveal whatever “more” there might be hidden underneath their anxiety.

2. THE MIDDLE OF THE BODY AND THE DEPTH OF FINGERS

Every focusing process implies direct reference to the felt sense in the middle of the body. Gendlin points at the fact, however, that the ways in which this can be established can differ. Tuning in with phenomena in other body parts can be a useful intermediary step:

“Something at the periphery, something that does not come directly from the *felt sense* but somewhere from below or aside or from wherever, can be also very important and deep. (...) We should not use the *felt sense* then to block something else. (...) The *felt sense* is in the centre of your body, but (for example) sometimes something comes out of the depth of your fingers. We should not skip that. Then, later, you have to find back where that came from.” (Gendlin, 1993).

This method of body mapping connects with the middle of the body by using “the depth of fingers” as an intermediary step. When a child bends over an empty body to feel its surface with his/her fingers, this posture by itself tunes him/her in with the body. During the mapping process the child is not explicitly invited to attend to the middle of the body, but it happens all the same. Emily, 17 years old, described how this kind of resonance occurs:

“From the moment on when I begin to feel the paper (body), a current goes back and forth all the time: from the paper to my belly, back to the paper, and so on, like a kind of switch. It is a signal sent back and forth without me steering it deliberately. At the moment when my finger touches something on the paper where it reacts, I really do feel contact. Then I feel a strange prickling in my fingers, but then I am also connected with my belly, like a central place that reacts with a kind of bellyache. When my fingers get outside that (reactive) place on the paper, my belly and my fingers no longer react in that way; then there is still back-and-forth contact, but you don’t really feel something anymore; you feel that again as soon as you enter a (reactive) place again.”

As far as the body mapping works as intended, contact with the middle of the body is initiated. Gradually, short-circuit is counterbalanced. While the mapping goes on, “bodily talking back” gets restored; a self-propelled feeling process begins to unfold. The mapping instructions below describe how this can be promoted. Subsequently, we follow two therapies that illustrate how this can function in practice, how simply this method can facilitate experiential steps and how complicated it can be in other cases. Finally, we look at the therapy of a younger child. I will try to show that although we cannot check the bodily resonance of younger children as reliably as we can when we work with older ones, body mapping can provide an essential element to the therapeutic process of these children as well.

3. MAPPING DISSOCIATION: BASIC INSTRUCTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN, INCLUDING ADOLESCENTS

The basic attitude during the instructions is one of receiving. Everything that comes freshly during the following steps is welcomed and received patiently.

The therapist draws the contours of a life-sized empty body on paper. The child is asked to sit in front of (or next to) this paper body and bend over it. Although not openly invited to, the child's attention goes to the centre of his/her body by his/her posture. He/she is invited to travel very slowly with the fingers of one hand across the surface of this empty container, asking inside where presumed indicators of dissociation ("voices", "fear places" or "unrest places") might be found. Wherever the child arrives on the paper surface, he/she checks inside if there is a bodily resonance: an unmistakably felt back-and-forth contact between the fingers and the belly, which signals the presence of a dissociation-linked phenomenon. [Exceptionally, some children report a response on the corresponding place in their own body — e.g. lower left shoulder when he/she touches the lower part of a shoulder on paper — instead]. When resonance takes place, the child marks the contours of that specific place on the paper body with a pencil. This scanning continues until all reactive places in the body have been localized. During this and the following steps, it could be an option to ask the child to try the same with the fingers of the other hand.

The child is asked to address to the paper body again and to choose two of the identified places. He/she is invited to travel on the paper surface between them and feel if a bodily reaction signals the presence of a pathway between the two. Any detected pathway is delineated by the child with a pencil. In this way, the child travels between all consecutively selected pairs of reactive places. A network of connected places may take shape.

The next task for the child is to travel along each pathway once again with his/her fingers, asking inside if bodily resonance indicates that there is a (one-way or two-way) direction of 'traffic' on that pathway. The direction(s) of all detected (parts of) traffic is/are indicated with arrows.

Subsequently, the child gets 4 colored markers (blue, red, green and yellow). He/she is asked to brush softly along one of the identified places with a closed marker, then with a second, then with a third and finally the fourth. If he/she notices resonance when (a part of) that place is stroked by one of these colored markers in particular, the child gives this (part of that) place that specific color. In this same way, one by one, all the identified places get colored. Then, in the same way, all the detected pathways are touched and colored.

The child is asked to notice if there is a whole region on the paper body that remained blank. He/she is asked to travel through that region one more time (with the fingers of either hand), and ask his/her body to confirm that this blank really signifies blank, or if it signifies that in this region reactive places and connections are more tightly hidden. If this kind of inside questioning leads to the detection of new places and/or connections, they are addressed the same way as the others.

In most of the cases, the therapist will notice that the emerging network contains one or more triangular systems (three mutually interactive places) that might function as a brain-

cutting machinery. If this seems to be the case, the child is invited to travel with one finger across the whole surface of that triangle to find out if his/her body gives a resonance indicating a “something in there”. The child can draw the shape of any “something in there” with a pencil on the detected place.

If the child has localized a “something in there”, he/she is guided to find words or a phrase that exactly seem to fit to what this seems to be. Whatever label the child uses freshly is received. Sooner or later the child could be invited to let these phrases or words resonate with the body by trying them out loud. What might be referred to first as “the black hole” might turn into words like “the hidden silence” or “the place with the something that should be kept inside”.

Painting can be added as a way of asking inside. To ask a child to paint a considerable enlargement of a slightly visible “black hole” can function as a way of asking “What’s really in this...?” To ask the child to paint “the core of the hidden silence” can function as asking “What’s the crux of all this?”

All elements similar to the ones mentioned above can function as a next entrance point to a continuing process of detection and change. Although these children mobilize a lot of strength and courage during the mapping process, they are vulnerable all the same. Sometimes they show a delicate balance. It is important to follow their pace and protect them against becoming too exhausted or losing the right distance. Although the evocation of triggers is an essential ingredient of this work, these children should not get overwhelmed by triggered images and/or sheer emotion; the aim is always to keep working at the edge (allowed by the “I”), followed by control of the “I”. Protective measures which are rarely needed may be helpful. If at a certain moment it is too threatening for the child to draw a line, he/she could be invited to try to draw a dotted line instead. Two weeks later he/she might be ready to draw the unbroken line after all. If visual contact with certain parts of the network laid bare so far on paper, specifically the head and/or the hands, disturbs the child’s further detection work by triggering images too strongly, it can be stopped by covering this specific part of the paper body with small sheets of paper while the explorations continue.

4. CASE ILLUSTRATIONS.

Three case illustrations will be given: a therapy to show how simply this method can work; a second one to show how complicated it can be; and a third to describe how body mapping can be done by a younger child.

4.1. Rafaël: entering the circles of fear

Rafaël, 11 years old, was no longer able to correct his doom-mongering. Minor stress-inducing stimuli made him lose his balance. He reported frequent nightmares. He was “deadly frightened of death”.

Rafaël had always been a fragile, receptive child. During the last 6 months, however, his problems had increased considerably after a quarrel with his sister, who deliberately

made him believe for several seconds that he had suffocated her. Since that moment he had lived in a frightful trance. He needed to wash his hands whenever he had to touch his sister. Intrusive thoughts plagued him. “Can I still eat? Won’t I become ill? Won’t she become ill as well? Won’t she die?”

In a trance everything seems to be true. Rafaël was absent-minded and confused. He could no longer calm his panic. Sometimes he put his head in his hands, commenting helplessly that he was no longer “the real Rafaël”. Frequently occurring nightmares colored his all day life. He vomited when he had to go to school.

During our first contact in the play room Rafaël was flustered and weakly focused. He told me about his repeated frightening and aggressive thoughts. Not only did he think that minor things could cause his death, but he also worried permanently that he might have caused problems to others. He worried he had broken their neck, had broken their lungs with his touch or had made someone pregnant because he thought he might have had an ejaculation. Talking and playing didn’t help. Drawing his nightmares didn’t either. Rafaël was unable to get a new perspective on what was flooding him. These bursts of his inner orchestra, this evidence of “sheer emotion”, needed to turn back into his ability to “sense” underneath.

From the 2nd till the 8th session Rafael designed his body map. In this way, he detected about 20 ‘fear-places’ spread across his body. Still working on paper, additionally he detected places where he noticed what he called a ‘voice’ or a ‘sound’. He marked these places with a black star. He also marked some places in the brain area on the paper, where, according to the detection by his fingers he had stored an ‘image’. Finally, when I asked to name of these ‘fear-places’, he ranked several of them according to a military hierarchy.

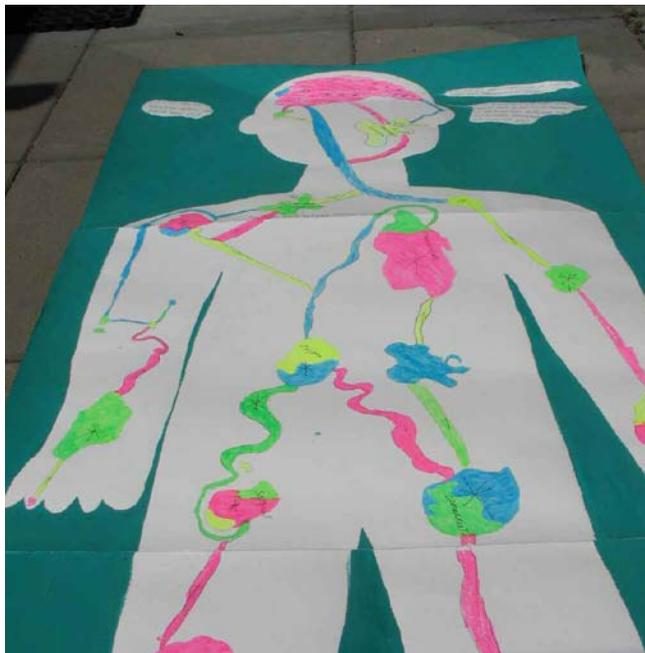


Figure 1: Rafaël's first body map.

During those weeks Rafaël frequently looked at his duplicated body, which was beginning to take shape. Keeping the right distance with his body separate from his paper body, but still connected enabled him to reconnect with his felt sense. “With anxiety it is hard to let a felt sense form, but if it does it is instantly rewarding because the anxiety decreases” (Gendlin, 1996). Talking from his new position, disassociating from his dissociation, Rafaël was getting beyond his panic. He found new words unravelling the bodily phenomena which had kept him in panic so thoroughly. Pointing at a part of the brain he had drawn, he commented:

“This is the boss. This is where the highest shock comes from. Here is retained what happened to me my whole life.(...) When I begin to think about dreadful things, I feel a full blast shock there, and that shock spreads all over my body. Here (at shoulder level) it becomes unbearable pain, below there it all subsides again.”

Until recently Rafaël explained he frequently dissociated when he had done or thought something stress-inducing. During the last weeks, however, this almost had not occurred to him.

“I was always thinking, thinking, thinking. For example that somebody becomes angry. Then it seemed as if I slept and was dreaming. Then I heard nothing anymore. Then I got an image that I fear, and then suddenly there was a tremendous shock through my whole body until it stopped at my feet. And then I was totally awake again.”

Now that he kept exploring from the right distance, the sharp reduction of Rafaël’s anxiety reconstituted his experiencing. He reported a sharp decrease of the repetitive worries in his head. In his sand play, the stereotypical sceneries with pent-up fight situations disappeared; with increased patience and intense pleasure he began to build sand palaces instead. Something had opened up.

A couple of weeks later Rafaël proudly reported that his anxiety had lost its grip. He felt more solid. A boy who used to tease him at school gave similar feedback: “Formerly you always were staring at the ground when I did that”, the boy had said, “and now you give me a big mouth. I am not used to that.”

After 4 months of treatment the landscape of a newly made second body map confirmed what Rafaël had said: the impact of shocks on his life had been minimized. His parents reported considerable change. Rafaël’s nightmares were almost gone. Symptoms like vomiting and being “deadly frightened of death” had disappeared. He was coping better with unexpected events. School-results improved. He began to take more initiative. Therapy was cut back; we finished shortly after.

4.2. Oscar: entering the factory explicitly

Oscar, 14 years old, was depressed and suicidal. He had “agonizing pain”. Comments by “threatening voices” in his head were followed by “a burning feeling” spreading through his body. Oscar moved stiffly. Sometimes he could barely walk. He was hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic where this therapy took place.

When Oscar and I met for the first time the sound and intensity of his voice changed continuously. Unmistakably, in a fluctuating make-up, different portions of his selves mixed up with his “I” in talking with me. Oscar did not know much about his past. Talking all this over, Oscar decided to begin to unravel what was capturing him in order to regain control. When I explained to him how body mapping might help him, he agreed to try.

Oscar scanned the paper replica of his body in search of what he called “the fear and unrest-places” of his inner voices. In spite of heavy inner protest, he decided to localize these voices on his body map. He traced these places, gave them names, and revealed the pathways that connected them.

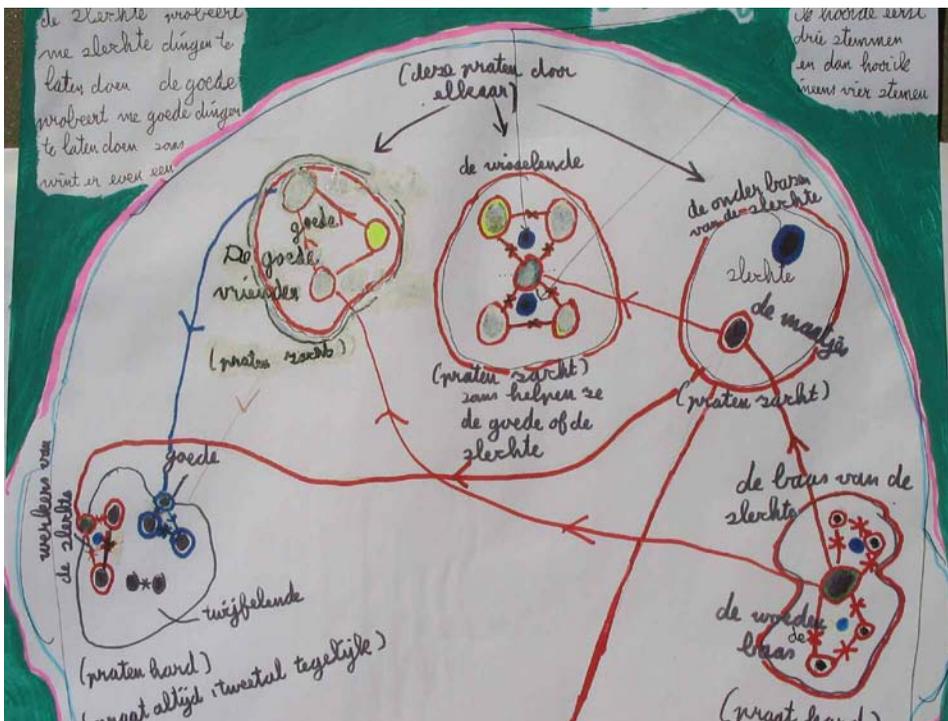


Figure 2: Fragment of Oscar's first body map (voices localized in his head).

After several weeks of looking at his body map Oscar noticed that five voice-places in the head were shaped together like a sandglass; two triangular systems, one of them upside down on top of the other. I asked him to scan the whole paper surface of these triangles with his fingers, and ask inside whether these areas were really empty or if some bodily reaction indicated the presence of a ‘something’ there. When he did, fresh words came up. He mentioned that the pathways between these five voice-places felt like “electric wire”, like a barrier preventing passage. Once again, I asked him to feel with his fingers on paper if the triangular surfaces surrounded by this electric wire had been mapped sufficiently. Oscar took that question in and checked again. New words came. Each triangle, he said now, contained a ‘bomb-piece’. He drew both bomb-pieces on his body map; turned

his attention inside; peeked at those pieces. Then, referring to the sandglass, he began to talk about “machines” that kept these voice-places active, because otherwise “something would happen”.

I asked Oscar to put these “machines” under a magnifying glass: to draw them considerably enlarged on a separate piece of paper, and write his comment next to it.

Oscar’s out-loud knowing and sharing of these mechanisms caused that they began to falter. During the next session Oscar told me that last weekend, for the first time since years his muscles had been working smoothly.

“When the corner-pieces didn’t succeed any longer to remain active, something in the middle of the triangles exploded. The bombs blew in all directions. For the time being, the triangle was totally broken down. For some time, I almost didn’t hear anything anymore, until it started again, as if they gradually built up the wall again. They don’t want me to feel fine. When I am doing fine, something happens with the middle pieces.”

Angry voices inside protested against these new disclosures. Oscar was ordered to stop eating and drinking. Fighting against drowsiness that began to capture him, he talked about “a ticking time bomb inside, that he needed to keep under control at any cost:

“I do everything to prevent that that bomb will explode, because otherwise I am a dangerous person.”

Oscar drew once again enlarged what one “machine” looked like.

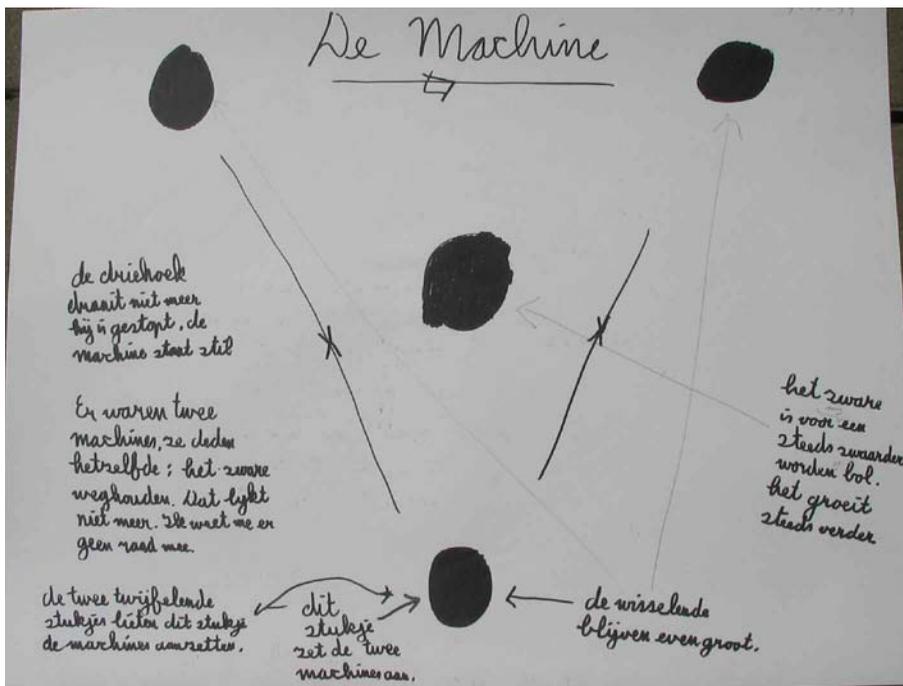


Figure 3: The Machine (this second time: separately).

Inside that clockwork he drew a bomb. Then there was a felt shift. That bomb-piece contained ‘the heavy’, he said.

“The voices become softer now, and more often they are gone. Now they don’t object when I tell about the machines. The depression emerges. That depression in the two bomb-pieces bothers me a lot. I call it ‘the heavy’. The machines kept the heavy away. They pressed it inward. But now the machines have come to a standstill. The triangle does not run any longer to thwart the heavy. I try to push it back, but it is an increasingly ponderous ball with which I am at an utter loss.”

Following his pace, I did not seek for information about what might be the content of that ‘heavy’, but asked Oscar if he wanted to paint this heavy. He painted: a red core, encapsulated by a black ring, surrounded by a second red ring and an expanding black exterior. He wrote ‘the heavy’ above it.



Figure 4: The Heavy

Two weeks later Oscar painted a considerably enlarged ‘kernel of the heavy’. A big coal-black spot appeared. When I verbalized how black that black seemed to be, Oscar grabbed his head. He reported that voices told him to keep his mouth. I asked him if he was ordered to keep a secret.

“I think that there is a secret”, he confirmed. “The secret is not allowed to come out, but it also cannot be kept inside any longer.”

I asked Oscar to look at his painting and attend to the middle of his body. He went back and forth from his body to that coal black spot to see if any words would come. Then he whispered that this was not a ‘kernel’ but ‘*a complete atomic bomb*’. He painted this ‘*atomic bomb*’ the way he felt he carried it inside and wrote this handle above his new painting.

One day about two months later sitting in front of his first body map, Oscar said that it no longer represented how he felt in his head. I invited him to feel with his fingers and to depict a new one freshly. While he scanned how he experienced the network in his head right now, the fog concerning his past was lifting further.

“During the last 2 months my mind has become clearer”, he reported. “And I can think better. Most of the pieces inside no longer disturb me that much. These days, every now and then I see before me how the situation at home has been.”

Oscar told me, that the tension in his muscles had decreased considerably these last months. It had been a long time ago that pain had awakened him during the night for the last time.

During the weeks that followed, Oscar began to talk increasingly about difficult feelings related to the past. He hesitated at a gateway. *“I don’t want to retrieve difficulties”, he said, “If I take the lid off that cesspool, we’ll get into a lot of trouble.”*

The lid, however, had opened already enough to cause him trouble temporarily. The ‘burning’ came back. Oscar explained this as follows:

“The boss is frightened. (...) He carries dreadful memories of the past, which I see in front of me every now and then. There are several locks on that cesspool, and I don’t get those locks away. I was standing on my feet, but right now I almost lay on my back.”

Some time later the inner balance shifted again. Oscar, who had improved enough to be discharged from the clinic after a hospitalization of 15 months, gathered new strength. The therapy continued. Bending over a new body map searching with his finger where to find the ‘bomb’ space on his paper body he appeared to be ready for a next step. He grabbed his chest, and remarked: *“This place signifies something. That bomb might be situated right here, at this lower place, instead of higher up in my body.”* Oscar delineated the chest-area on his body map where the bomb drew his attention. However, his fingers did not give any resonance when they explored that specific chest-area further. Because Oscar got stuck, I tried something new instead, that although keeping them very close to each other prevented direct contact between his fingers and the paper chest: a transparent plastic sheet with several concentric circles around a bull’s-eye on it. His fingers drove that bull’s-eye across the delineated paper chest area searching for the bomb. After travelling for months on paper, this bull’s-eye arrived at a place that caused a very strong reaction. Oscar’s legs failed him when he tried to rise to his feet. His face looked distorted because of the pain at this place — close to his heart — where the bomb had been found. His chest was constricted so heavily that he almost could not breathe.

Oscar did not give up. He allowed me to talk with “the boss” about the memories that came closer. He decided to listen to those tape recorded talks. That he dared to do this seemed to be a major step. Since that step, he had been more “himself”. He had been thinking clearly and his ability to concentrate had improved. He was told to show more self-confidence now, to be able to express more precisely what he wanted. He commented:

“In the therapy we went in the direction of something very important. Until then he wanted to lock up things. But now somehow he has lost already.”

Oscar disclosed a differentiation between what he called “the boss” and what he called “the protector”. I asked him to try to indicate — on a new body map — on all triangles on which corners of the triangles “myself”, “the boss” and “the protector” — each indicated with a color of its own — appeared to be. This appeared to be extremely difficult for Oscar. Halfway he faltered.

“I feel the bomb”, he said. ‘It becomes totally warm. Where we arrived now is very important. I feel it in my muscles. I am permanently connected with all kinds of systems.’

Oscar allowed me to talk with “the boss” to ask him how that faltering could be explained. “The boss” suggested to me, that Oscar had once witnessed something, and that there might be revenge if he would disclose that. When Oscar heard this on tape, he grasped his head in pain, as if he was beaten on his head with an iron stick.

“I was just listening,” he said some moments later. “Suddenly there was a heavy blow. My whole body; my whole head. A slap on my head.”

Something had come close to awareness. Images of the past appeared:

“I saw lots of images of my grandfather. Things we have done, finally his death. All kinds of things about the past come up. I had stopped it, but I can’t anymore. It was shut. And now all kinds of memories from the time of the two last classes of elementary school come to the surface. I have those pieces in my head now, but I don’t know how to tell this.”

The next session, working on his newest body map again, Oscar grasped his chest, where the bomb began to react. I held his hand to his chest and asked him if he could try to talk from that place. Something began to dawn on him. He feared for his life. “I am a dead man”, he said. “I can’t. I am not allowed to say anything. I am not allowed.”

When — two weeks later — I asked him if I could talk with “the boss”, Oscar drew the line. “I don’t give you much chance that he will say something. Right now I don’t want him to.”

It seemed that the moment of truth had come: the truth that had reached Oscar concerning what had once happened to him, and the truth that Oscar chose not to disclose this in the therapy. Oscar had become the guard of his bomb himself, and he decided to keep it that way. “To be honest”, he said during the 67th therapy session, “I don’t want it to come out. I decided that I want to stop with the therapy.”

Oscar took some time to think this over. On the date agreed, his mother phoned me to confirm that his decision was final.

4.3. Body mapping by a younger child

When Zinzi was an infant, her mother and she were part of a group that was evacuated from an African war-zone. They moved to Europe. But somehow ‘war’ travelled along with them. Zinzi and her mother, as well as some other women and children, were terrorized secretly in an ‘African church’. During a long period they were tortured and raped as a part of exorcize rituals. This calculated cruelty had a tremendous existential impact. When Zinzi was 4 years old, her desperate mother stood with her in the window, ready to jump. Since then her mother went from one psychotic episode to the other. Zinzi regressed. She was obsessed with blood, smeared with excrements. After some time of rambling, Zinzi and her mother came to The Netherlands. Zinzi was committed to a Dutch foster home. Her foster parents supported her during her therapeutic process.

Zinzi — 6 years old — was drenched with fear. Especially during the first months of our play therapy sessions I tried to be mindful of Hermann’s clear warning (1992): “The first task of recovery is to establish the survivor’s safety”, and that “must be based on the self-protective capacity of the victim.” I followed Zinzi’s initiative in playing the same scenery a hundred times: she ‘fainted’ (sometimes ‘died’) and sank down on the ground; following her instructions, I — the ‘doctor’ — gently took her in my arms, operated her, and guided her gradual recovery. Gradually, Zinzi began to introduce dolls to express her fears and coping mechanisms. I tried to listen and respond patiently and be present in a non-intrusive way. Then, after 2 months, she mentioned straightforwardly: “My mother wanted to kill me. When you have fainted, you are still alive.”

Ambivalence was tangible. “Tomorrow I won’t return because I am ill”, Zinzi would play, adding: “I am just kidding, I will return, to come and be with you.” She gathered courage. “Let us play horrible things”, she invited, “at first only you. Then I will say: ‘I don’t dare to come.’ We must kill those men who want to kill children.”

While the intensity of her fear decreased, Zinzi went on to disclose, step by step. “Men put a fish inside me, between my legs”, is one of the messages she gave me. I was supposed not to respond to them as facts that had actually taken place. In most cases I just received such a message with her, resonating what she had said, without asking questions; when I violated that rule she would delete what she had introduced. “Oh no, that was a joke of my mother.”

While I had to keep ‘saving’ her again and again, Zinzi showed growing trust. “My former problems are still in my head”, she said one day. I took this as an invitation to explore this more specifically. I asked her if she ever heard voices in her head, or elsewhere in her body. “As many as letters, twenty”, she answered. Immediately after this confirmation she drew the limit. She asked for a break to go to the toilet.

After half a year of this non-intrusive kind of play therapy it was reported that Zinzi had taken up her development again. Her results at school improved. “Increasingly”, her teacher told, “she can keep her emotions under control and is able to show them adequately.” For the time being, Zinzi had found a better balance. After one year of play therapy the

frequency had been reduced to infrequent follow up sessions. Then something happened, that initiated the next step of facing and processing her trauma more thoroughly.

One day, when Zinzi saw a girl vomit, she was overwhelmed with frightening flashbacks. She hallucinated that her mother was present, who told her that she should die. Her foster mother had to stop her from trying to kill herself.

Back in the play-therapy room, Zinzi was terrified. Trance-like, a thumb in her mouth, she whispered that someone inside wanted her to die. She seemed to have shrunk to just that one question. At this point I decided to intervene. I wanted her — in full awareness and acknowledgement of the presence of this demanding ‘it’ — to become able to explore the whole complexity of *all* that seemed to be stuck and conflicting inside.

First, I drew a small sketch of a body on a piece of paper and assisted her finger to seek the place on that sketch that indicated where that voice seemed to talk to her from the inside.

Secondly, I made a life-size container — a paper body — that could carry the whole dynamics of her dissociation. While I drew that silhouette of a body, I explained that I had something that might help her to find out if she had made boxes inside where she had stored up threatening memories that she almost could not bear, and that she could learn to open the lids of those boxes little by little. Some of these memories, I told her, seemed to break out and overwhelm her now; I emphasized that it was important that she would get access to those boxes, that she would gradually become able to open them herself, if and as far as she dared and wanted to; as her own boss, in control of herself.

After this explanation, Zinzi pulled herself together somehow. I asked her to feel with her fingers on the silhouette where boxes might be detected in her body. She got stuck again. The idea of touching her own body — although indirectly — seemed too scary for her. But — creating a bit more distance by make believe — when I proposed to her to name that paper body ‘*the doll Zinzi*’, that solved her problem.

Zinzi wrote “The doll Zinzi” on her paper. With her fingers she traced and drew a number of ordinary boxes plus two deeply fortifying boxes-in-boxes-in-boxes. When she had done this, she mentioned that the core of each of the two multi-layered fortifications was inhabited by a “voice that you don’t see.” Receiving this without further comment, I asked her to write “A voice that you don’t see” on her paper, and connect it with an arrow to where she had traced it.

Zinzi gradually opened her mind to her dissociated feelings and memories. The paper body map functioned as a silent thread, a growing body of evidence about (the bodily impact of) facts that she now began to remember and/or know out-loud, write down, receive and bear. Sitting on the safety providing lap of her foster-mother, who sometimes assisted during parts of the play-therapy sessions, Zinzi began to put the pieces of the puzzle of the horrific facts of her past together: her being raped by several men, different ways in which she had been tortured, and her enforced participation in the torturing of other victims. Whenever waves of memories came up when she was at home, they were written down and/or drawn and brought to the session, where we worked with it, distinguishing:

- 1) The remembered threatening events, now processed by talking, drawing and playing (some of these facts were recorded on her body map later on when she was ready for that).
- 2) The bodily dissociation mechanisms caused by those threats, now traced and recorded on the body map.

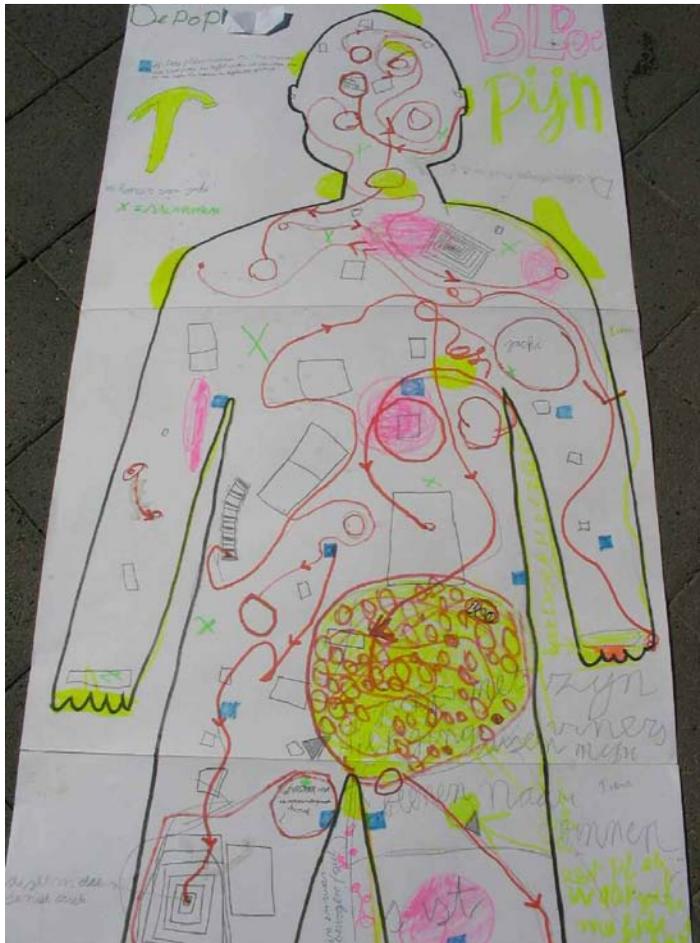


Figure 5: Zinzi's body map.

During the months that followed, chain reactions were set off: body memories evoked physical pain in certain body parts; that localized pain brought memories back; those memories brought new verbalizations; those verbalizations brought new memories.

Step by step, Zinzi shifted the edges of what she dared to explore out loud. In spite of her waves of panic and instability, the overall level of her anxiety quieted down. Nightmares became rare those days.

Zinzi's "I" appeared to be increasingly in charge. I asked her, seeking with her fingers, to trace more places of unrest inside, that might be connected with what had happened to her in the past. She felt with her fingers, encountered places, pin-pointed these, pin-pointed connecting pathways, and determined the directions of those connections. Then, looking at her body map, she revealed the place inside where she heard her mother talk. She also revealed several places where she heard voices talk in French. Those voices, she realized, sounded similar to those of the offenders who once terrorized her. When I asked her to localize where the voices of these men were to be found on her body map, she needed a distancing step in order to connect. Not daring to do approach the paper body directly with her own fingers, she used her hand to lead the fingers of her foster-mother towards the right spots on the doll. When this shared scanning had taken place, she made another leap forward: she disclosed the names of those men, and registered on the places on her body map corresponding with the places where her body carried them. She also traced the other voices that she heard inside, by marking their places with a cross on her map.

That liberating step of disclosure unleashed the almost unbearable physical pain we mentioned above. Temporarily, that pain made it very difficult for Zinzi to dare to come to the therapy at all. She slept badly. Sometimes she felt too shaky to go to school. It took many safety providing, nondemanding sessions to help her gather new courage. She frequently tested out my reliability in doll's play; playing the bad wolf, she tried several ways to seduce me to cooperate with him to catch Red Riding Hood. Bit by bit, accompanied with ups and downs, Zinzi began to verbalize and write down the specifics of the tortures that once had caused that pain; pain that had never really stopped plaguing her and that she felt more sharply now. The picture of all the cruelties that had happened to her became more complete.

Now that she had clarified these causes of her physical pains, I asked Zinzi to address her body map again. Next to her head on the body map she drew the hammer of one of the offenders. She colored on that map the exact places where she had been hit and was still hurting (in yellow), and the places where she had been bleeding (in pink). One of those weeks she pinpointed gruesome details by writing them on her body map paper. The whole picture of what had happened became more and more complete. Although Zinzi had pictured on her body map that her abdominal area was filled with unrest, I followed her signals that we should leave this "painful mass" unexplored until — whenever — she would be ready for that next step.

Late in the chain of the elements that had come out of the dark, Zinzi began to tell how she and her mother had been compelled to violate each other. She explored the resulting feelings of guilt and self-hatred she had. When this had come to the fore, her fear silenced further down. Stability returned. The happenings of her past no longer obstructed her functioning to a perturbing degree.

The frequency of our sessions was reduced again; after three years of therapy we finished.

5. CONCLUSION

“The fear is like dust in my blood”, Emily noticed when her therapy started. When body mapping works, that kind of dust dissipates.

The children I treated had become increasingly frightened over the years; concurrently, they had become less and less able to sense. Their low experiencing level had a detrimental effect on their functioning. The use of body mapping, breaking the circles by clearing the right space, brought this functioning as “fixed machines” to an end. A key factor in how these children achieved this seemed to be that this body mapping — enabling the “I” to approach its dissociated functioning in a bearable way — enabled them to disrupt their fear-factory activity while their inner separateness diminished. This restored the ability of their body to live and bear inner connectedness: find and touch the pain/fear involved in avoided “worst spots,” going hand in hand with the experience of “breathing again” (Gendlin, 1996). It enlarged the possibilities of their “I” to process experience, and turn their development into a life-forward direction. They began to process their trauma, as far as their situation allowed them to do that.

All over the world there are children who have been (and will be) confronted with extremely overwhelming situations that cause helplessness similar to the helplessness encountered by the children I described. Violent processes, inflicted by human beings or by other environmental disasters, leave the “dust” of fear in their blood. In cases when those circumstances make an emergency state of dissociation inevitable, dynamics are created that these children cannot undo by themselves. Therapeutic methods are needed to help them recover. The post-traumatic stress symptoms of survivors of rape, violence in the family and incest — including traumatic trance and repetition — are essentially the same as those capturing survivors of war (Herman, 1992). Long after the extremely frightening situation (the war/the incest/the physical violence/the physical threat) is over, the mind and nervous system of the surviving child can still be attuned to that past situation, and perpetuate suffering. It is my conviction, that the way those phenomena should be dealt with therapeutically is basically the same as the one I described. The technique of body mapping might prove to be a helpful tool in many of those cases.

Therapeutic treatment requires reduction of actual threat. As I mentioned before, the securing of safety has priority over everything else. Whenever we know that a traumatizing situation continues, it should be halted whenever it is in our power to influence that. In the middle of a traumatizing situation the space for successful body mapping — like for any other therapeutic processing — is very limited.

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NEW PATTERNS OF RELATING TO OTHERS

FOCUSING ENABLES CHILDREN TO LIVE WITH FEAR

Lucy Bowers

“When the forms of an old culture are dying, the new culture is created by a few people who are not afraid to be insecure.”

— East German dissident Rudolph Bahro

In these times of turbulent transformation it seems as if the ground under our feet is becoming more and more soft and uncertain. Our environment is drastically changing and due to the saturation of the media, we see and hear about those changes daily. The changes are not only environmental in nature, they are escalating in complexity and taking us into an unknown future of desperate scientific debates. Political upheaval, war, and pandemics are also adding to ecological issues and affecting how we view our world and how we try to live in it. Hopelessness and fear have become the companions that accompany us everywhere.

Children are particularly affected by this pervasive hopelessness. From their perspective, we need a new way to be in this world that is so rampant with fear. I suggest that using Focusing with children offers them what Rabbi Harold Kushner calls *“the gift of resilience”*. In fact, Focusing can give children the tools to move forward beyond resilience towards healthy growth and development, emotionally, physically, socially and intellectually.

As you read the following interviews with children dealing with their fears, I invite you to take them in gently and pay attention to your own *“felt sense”*. I hope to persuade you of the profound benefits of sharing what we have learned as Focusers whenever we are with children.

AN ISRAELI GIRL LIVES WITH FEAR

The first story, about an Israeli girl named Danielle, 9, is excerpted from Canadian children’s writer Deborah Ellis’s book *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*.

“I celebrated my birthday the other day. I had a party with my family, and I had another party with my friends. At the party with my friends, we had pizza, which is my favourite food. We played a lot of games, like statues. Statues is when you move around to music, and when the music stops, you have to freeze in that position. It’s hard to do without laughing. It’s fun. I’m in grade three. My mom brought me to McDonald’s today as a treat.

Jerusalem is a good city to live in. There are a lot of nice places to see, like parks and museums. We go to places on school trips, and sometimes I go with my family. I know there is a war going on, but I don’t know why. I would rather

there was peace. I hear about bombs on television, about bombs going off in shops and on buses, and it makes me afraid. My parents get worried looks on their faces when they read the newspapers or listen to the radio.

*I don't know why the Palestinians are so angry with us. We're nice people. I don't know any Palestinians. If I could meet a Palestinian girl my age, we could play together. That way she could see that I'm nice and friendly and she won't want to blow me up. Bombs scare me more than anything else. I don't know when they will explode. They could explode while I am shopping for shoes or riding on a bus. I wouldn't have to be doing anything wrong for a bomb to get me. A bomb won't get me in McDonald's, though. There are guards at the door, and they search everyone on their way in. They searched me and looked through my backpack. Most buildings have guards who search. You have to let them, or they will think you are going to blow something up, and be mad at you."**

Writer Deborah Ellis summarizes the effect of conflict on kids: *“Even very young children feel the impact of the war, on both sides of the conflict. A study prepared by the University of Tel Aviv’s School of Social Work says all Palestinian and Israeli children have shown some signs of mental and emotional distress. Many have full-blown post-traumatic stress disorder. The emotional suffering of these children is bad enough to affect how they manage their daily lives.”*

No one wants children to be overwhelmed by fear. As parents, we want to shield our children from danger, even when it’s unrealistic or impossible. But we can’t protect them from fear, which is real and cannot be denied or taken away. As an emotion, fear is neither bad nor good and it comes in many forms and disguises. It does not need to be our enemy, but the usual way that we carry it in our bodies is a negative one that can limit how we lead our lives.

When fear is not processed it builds up and often leads to violence. Studies on TV and media violence and how it impacts children have been numerous over the past two decades. They often agree that watching screen violence does indeed desensitize us, raises our level of fear and anxiety, and fosters violent and aggressive behaviour towards others. Real-life experiences of fear and violence can only deepen and worsen these ill effects.

But imagine the paradigm shift that can occur if fear is not removed or denied but somehow allowed to exist in a way that is comfortable and fosters a deeper relationship with ourselves and others. This idea may seem challenging for those who have not experienced how Focusing operates. In my Focusing experience, fear can be a doorway into a vague, unsettled, inchoate place that allows forward momentum, helps the body shift into a more comfortable way of being and often offers insight about that next step.

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A PALESTINIAN GIRL DEALS WITH FEAR, VIOLENCE AND DESTRUCTION

The next excerpted interview from the same book, *Three Wishes*, illustrates compellingly why we need to address this challenge and help children deal with their fears more positively. I invite you to stay with your felt sense as you read this account. Salam, a Palestinian girl, is the 12-year-old sister of Aayat, who committed suicide and became a martyr at the age of 17, murdering two people and injuring twenty-eight others. Listen to Salam's words and hear how fear affects her world view.

"I have six sisters and four brothers. I am in the sixth grade at school. When I grow up I want to be a lawyer.

I am tired right now because I only went to bed a short while ago. When soldiers come they usually come in the night, so I am too frightened to sleep then. I like to be awake at night so I am not surprised by them if they come. Being surprised by them makes it worse, makes me feel worse, more scared and ashamed. We are under curfew now, so it doesn't matter when I sleep. We can't leave the house, so I can sleep any time I want to. I don't mind when there is a curfew because I don't like school, and there is no school when there is curfew. I don't like to study or do school work. Why bother? The Israelis won't let us do anything with our education, so why bother to get one?

I do mind that I can't see my friends and be a normal kid when there is a curfew. But if we leave the house the soldiers will shoot at us. There have always been soldiers. They don't like us. I have seen the things they do. They are all around us. They throw gas bombs, shoot at children, destroy houses, arrest people and make them sit on the ground for a long time with blindfolds on. The soldiers stand over them laughing and making them feel bad. Of course I have been hurt by soldiers. Everybody I know has been. I know a lot of children smaller than me, who have been hurt or killed by them. I've even seen soldiers shoot at an ambulance. They don't care. They just want to kill us all. You don't have to be doing anything bad to be hurt by the soldiers. You could just be walking down the street. I was walking down the street with my friends, and there was no curfew, and there were some boys nearby, and the soldiers shot one of them. We all carried him to the side of the road. He didn't die. He was just shot. When I heard that my sister had died, I was in the kitchen baking. She was late for dinner. We were all waiting for her before we ate. My parents were watching television, and we heard it on the news. She didn't tell me she was going to do this. We shared a bedroom, but she didn't tell me. I cried and cried.

The army came to our house that night. They smashed things. They shouted. They destroyed our door. Sarah, one of the international people, was here with us. She screamed at the soldiers to stop, but they wouldn't. They hit her just as if she had been a Palestinian. They arrested my brother. He is still in jail. He didn't do anything, but that doesn't matter to them. We all had to go outside. They knocked us to the ground. They took my older brothers away. We had to

*pay a lot of money to get some of them out. Aayat's picture is everywhere, on walls and in newspapers. She is very famous. She is a martyr and is now in paradise, where it is supposed to be very beautiful. I would like to join her there. I would have to become a martyr like her; to be able to be in paradise with her. I don't know if the girl she killed had a sister my age or not. What does it matter? I don't know any Israeli kids. Why would I want to?">**

Most of us can only imagine the terror that Salam feels nightly as she waits for the army to come and destroy her family home. Sadly, she is one of countless children all around the world who live with conflict, dread and terror every day. We cannot be surprised when studies show how such fear has a negative impact on children's daily lives, on their hope for the future, on the way they view the outside world.

"Are there unknown inner resources within the human species that, if brought to the surface, might make it possible for us not only to survive, but also grow beyond our destructive tendencies?"

— French theologian, Teilhard de Chardin

I believe these "inner resources" can be synonymous with the felt senses as Gendlin has developed our understanding of them. Our fears are just one of many emotions with which the felt sense expresses itself when more needs to unfold. Each fear sits in the body and over time presents itself in a variety of ways. The two most familiar responses of the body to fear are fight and flight. But a third and very common response to fear is immobility, as Peter Levine points out in *Waking the Tiger*, where he calls the immobility response "one of the three primary responses available to reptiles and mammals when faced with an overwhelming threat."

Levine believes that there is a way to go into the immobility response and come out of it without what he calls the debilitating effects of trauma. His book describes at length the role that the felt sense (as developed by Eugene Gendlin) plays in alleviating many symptoms of trauma. We all know of adults whose childhood experiences, whether trauma, dread, or even anxiety in large or small doses, carry in their body a continued sense of helplessness, or constant anxiety, or being a victim, or aggressive behaviour, to name but a few.

It is my belief that by giving children permission to gently be with what their bodies are experiencing at any given time, by staying with that, listening to it and honouring it, these negative outcomes will not need to be manifested in adulthood. Edwin McMahon and Peter Campbell have been working in this area with children (see Building Body-Links of Hope at www.biospiritual.org) for some time in Mexico. We urgently need to show children the potential available to them, when they are able to take care of fearful feelings in a way that's empowering rather than debilitating.

* Excerpt from *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak* by Deborah Ellis. Copyright © 2004 Deborah Ellis. Reprinted by permission of Groundwood Books.

TWO AMERICAN BOYS LEARN ABOUT TERRORISTS

It is not just in war zones that we find children suffering from fear, trauma and anxiety. Television, films, newspapers and computers expose children to all of these. Nowadays there appear to be very few locations around this globe where children have the luxury of their own childhood. Feeling safe and secure while small is a challenge for parents to provide their children. Listen to this account of a family holiday in upper New York state in 2003.

Steven, 7, was on a driving holiday with his younger brother, Owen, 5, and their parents. Steven's new-found ability to read meant he could look at the maps, read the many signs along the highway and feel quite confident and grownup. When the family stopped to tank up, Steven saw signs that prompted him to ask, "What is a terrorist hotline?" Both boys listened intently as their mother explained that we always need to keep a watchful eye for strange people and report any suspicious behaviour. The two little boys, who had some notion of the meaning of the word terrorist and the word terror that lurks inside it had been immediately placed on alert: their sense of security was somewhat shaken. For the remainder of the trip the parents were asked repeated questions about terrorists, showing the parents that the boys were carrying their anxiety in a bodily felt way. The children's natural curiosity became narrowed to observing people and asking if they might be terrorists. The enthusiasm of being on the trip had been tarnished.

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs shows that the need for safety and security both physical and emotional comes right after the primary human biological requirements for food and water. Maslow would instantly have recognized how Steven and Owen's essential need for safety was threatened by their conversation about terrorism. Maslow says that if this need in children for security is not met, their subsequent needs for love, belonging, self-esteem, acceptance, intellectual development and so on are severely compromised as they develop.

I believe that the little seeds of fear and doubt do not need to grow over time and cause arrested development. Even fears that seem minuscule, inconsequential and minor to an adult can be huge when carried in the small body and mind of a child. Regrettably, family settings are often a huge vacuum when it comes to helping children deal with fears and providing them with the sense of security they need.

A GIRL IS GRIPPED BY MOVIE VIOLENCE

The key to using Focusing effectively with children is for the caregivers, whether parents, grandparents or teachers, to know, understand and practice Focusing in their own lives. Intimate knowledge of the Felt Sense and how it operates in the body, and of the "Focusing Attitude" and its importance in providing a gentle, compassionate presence, are all necessary for movement in the process. The following is a firsthand report from a grandmother whose longtime personal experience with Focusing helped her respond to her seven-year-old grandchild's fears, allowing for a dramatic change in the girl's behaviour. Notice how Gran reflects back the quality of what is happening and accompanies Amanda through this experience.

"At 7 a.m. on Easter morning, the telephone woke me and a very tiny, uncharacteristically timid, voice asked, "Gran, did the Easter Bunny come to your house?" Surprised by

the call, the hour and the tiny voice, I firmly told Amanda to go back to bed and call much later. At 7:30 a.m. the phone rang again and the conversation went the same. This time I suggested that Amanda, who sounded more scared than excited, awaken her mother Susan (a struggling single mom).

I was already feeling some discomfort in my chest with those two phone calls when Amanda called again at 8 a.m. and asked if she and her mom could come earlier than the time I'd invited everyone for lunch. Without hesitation I agreed. By 10 a.m. Amanda and her mom were at my house. After scouring my place for hidden Easter treats, Amanda confided in the same small voice that, she had seen Chuckie the night before. My discomfort began to grow. "Who is Chuckie and where did you see him?" I asked, wondering what that had to do with the Easter Bunny she would have been anticipating that night.

"He is a puppet and he was on TV last night," she answered. The discomfort in my chest amplified as I grasped instantly that Amanda had seen an adult horror film. I immediately understood her phone calls and the fear in her voice. "Where was Mommy?" I asked. Just then Susan came into the room to hear Amanda say that Mommy had gone out the previous evening, leaving her. Angrily and defensively, Susan explained at length that she needed to shop and realized she had not been able to get an appropriate babysitter. While Susan and I had a shouting match, Amanda crawled under a table in tears. Eventually Susan walked out of the house in fury, feeling blamed and inadequate. Amanda's fears triggered by the horror film were now compounded by insecurity as she experienced the two people she loved most shouting angrily at one another.

Realizing at once the horror of it all, I reached out and took Amanda on my lap. I was listening to my own felt sense about the next step: It certainly didn't feel right to say anything. I noticed my own chest which now had a big "empty space" kind of feeling. Gently I allowed myself to be with that feeling while I held Amanda on my lap. I noticed that she allowed me to take her out from under the table and hold her while neither of us spoke. I noticed my own tears and how Amanda, who had curled up on my lap like a child half her age, held me tightly and sobbed quietly. As we sat there holding each other, I was flooded with the awareness that in experiencing the fear together, we were moving toward a strong experience of love. My heart began to swell and fill that huge empty space inside my chest. My physical change was amazing as I realized that what I felt in a real way was a very powerful love for Amanda. My felt sense gave me permission to finally speak. "I want us to sit here for as long as it takes for you to notice all the love I have inside me going into your body," I said. "When you feel full inside from all that love moving into you, we can let go."

Amanda was still clinging tightly and tears were still sliding quietly down her cheeks, but her sobs gradually dissipated. My tears were no longer there as I stayed with the fullness of my love and how it felt inside me. In the end, Amanda held on for 20 minutes before I felt her clinging lessen. It seemed remarkably sudden when she slipped off my lap and asked in a surprisingly strong voice, "Can we do anything to get ready for the others who are all coming, Gran?"

We had both experienced major physical shifts: Amanda's voice was back to normal, and my chest no longer ached, but was bursting with love and possibly joy. For the rest of that

day it was clear that something big had happened. All the family and friends who came for lunch and dinner commented on how unusually happy, helpful, friendly and outgoing Amanda was. Because she experienced a big felt shift in her body, everything flowed from there.

“Every bad feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of being if you give it space to move toward its rightness.”

— E.T. Gendlin

The way in which the grandmother kept company with her granddaughter and at the same time paid attention to her own felt sense about the next step, allowed the Focusing process to shift for both adult and child. It is my experience working with children and Focusing that they instinctively absorb this process and learn it easily without any need to read books on the subject or discuss it. They are too young to have a critic who gets in the way and they have a fresh imagination allowing them to be with what is happening in a gentle caring way. Their innate curiosity is helpful for that forward movement to be acknowledged and to allow for the further unfolding. It is almost an unconscious process that only needs to feel safe and nurtured. Children who are still in touch with the truth of that place inside themselves have taught me how valuable the Focusing process really is.

A SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENT REVISITS THE FEAR OF A TRAUMA

Let’s study another example of the power of Focusing as told by a special-needs teacher named Ms. P. A Focusing practitioner in her personal life, Ms. P. uses “Elevator Rides” as a regular activity in her classroom since attending some of my workshops many years ago. (Elevator Rides are a tool I developed in the 1980s to work with children in the classroom: simply stated, I tell them that everyone has a story in their body and we are able to take an “Elevator Ride” to visit the story that’s in your body. For more about Elevator Rides, see references.) Her pupils range in age from six to eight and enjoy Elevator Rides very much, often asking to do them when they come in from recess, or when they’re resolving a conflict, or anticipating the stress of a test. The students enjoy the opportunity to be quiet and allow the “elevator” to take them to their “stories” by pushing the story button on their control panels. Their enjoyment continues after the exercise, as they use their felt sense to guide them in finding whichever activity feels right as a follow-up, whether writing in their journal, painting, using plasticine or crayoning. Here is Ms. P.’s report of an Elevator Ride that had a profound effect on a boy named Joshua.

On this particular day as all the children were stretched out on the floor of the classroom in various locations with their eyes closed you could have heard a pin drop. Suddenly the sound of tears becoming sobs came from Joshua. I was absolutely astonished that not one of the other children raised their heads to see who or what was happening. They all continued on their Elevator Rides and then slowly and quietly went off to do their follow-up activity.

Ms. P. knew that it was important not to interrupt Joshua, touch him, or attempt to console him (she had to reassure the educational assistant and ask her not to interrupt Joshua’s

process in any way.) Ms. P. stayed quietly close by and held a “safe space” while he cried for nearly five minutes, while all the other children were quietly and busily engaged with their follow up activities. Then his tears stopped and he got up to take out his journal. He wrote in a highly focused manner for nearly 10 minutes without asking for help. Writing more pages than he ever had before, Joshua invented his own spelling as he went along and concluded with a picture. It was his first experience to enjoy a successful writing task that year.

Ms. P. continues: “I invited him to share his experience with the class.

“The other children listened in quiet awe as he told about something that had happened when he was very little, he thought, maybe three years old. He told how he had been trapped under a boat and drowned, then taken to hospital and brought ‘back to life.’ He was surprised to revisit that place of fear under the boat.

“Although he’d never before talked about the near-death experience, in the end he was very excited, happy and keen to tell about it. Joshua’s felt shift had taken place without any doubt, and was visible in his smiling face. The shift continued however during his lengthy journal writing. Because his fear was nurtured and given time and space to express itself, Joshua no longer seemed to need to cry about that experience. His story and his picture won not only his teacher’s admiration and respect, but also that of all his classmates.”

Ms. P. adds that having Elevator Rides in place as a regular classroom activity provided many surprises throughout the year and diminished blocks to learning in both small and very large ways.

The two stories at the outset of this paper point out the urgent need to teach children how to live with fear and terror. The next two accounts illustrate the effective change when children are invited to notice and nurture what is happening inside them by Focusing. Even when they have no control over the events in their lives, and fears are overwhelming, there seems to be a right way to be in all of it.

Now I wish to share the two final stories to show how easy it is to make it possible.

A BOY DEALS WITH FEAR OF A PARENT’S DEATH

The first comes from a grade three teacher named Mrs. R. who has taken many Focusing workshops and deeply trusts the process. She also uses Elevator Rides as a classroom activity.

On this particular Monday morning Mrs. R. receives terrible news from the office about one of her pupils, Kyle, 8, whose mother died of cancer when he was four. Mrs. R. learns that Kyle’s father has just gone into the hospital on the weekend and is terminally ill with cancer. Kyle, an only child, is being cared for by an aunt.

At recess Mrs. R. invites Kyle to stay with her to talk. He quickly asks if he can do an Elevator Ride, saying that he wants to go “to a really sad place inside” because he is really scared that his dad will die just like his mom. With his eyes closed, Kyle tells Mrs. R. that he is “in the elevator and the sad place is all white.” He sees himself and his dad playing base-

ball, then soccer together. “When I see my dad there is an orange light on the left and now the white light is on the right.” After spending some quiet time there he suddenly announces he is finished being in his story and asks, “Can I go out to play now?”

After recess, the first thing Kyle does is draw a picture of himself and his dad playing baseball. His usual behavioural problems for example, hurting other children, withdrawing and not wanting to cooperate or finish assigned tasks are absent for the rest of that day.

Several days later Kyle asks again if he can stay in at recess. He tells Mrs. R. he is worried and scared, saying, “It is really hard to be a little boy who has his mom die when he is little and now that he is bigger his dad will die! If my dad dies my tears will come out of my eyes like an ocean.” Kyle tells Mrs. R. that he knows “deep inside me that my dad is not ever coming home again.” He takes the Elevator Ride to his heart because “it feels sick in there.” After a moment of quiet he tells her with astonishing strength of character, “If only I could be sick and not my dad.” Then he reports, “I feel scared, very scared and worried and lonely.” Next he says, “If I wasn’t sick and dad wasn’t sick we’d have a different kind of life”. Once again he tells Mrs. R. when he is finished being in his story for that day.

Mrs. R. points out that normally she would feel very helpless having a student undergoing such a traumatic life experience. However she feels strongly that she is enabling Kyle to deal with his fears and the result seems to be fewer behavioural problems from him than previously.

After a week or so Kyle asks Mrs. R. if he can stay in for recess for a third Elevator Ride. On this “ride”, he tells her that his tummy where he travels in the safety of his own Elevator feels very sick. In his tummy he gets out of the Elevator and sees his dad. “Now I feel really sad,” he says, because “we are watching Mommy die together.” As his tears flow freely Kyle tells her that he is remembering how it felt to go home with his dad from the hospital. Then, Mrs. R. sees Kyle’s tears turn to anger as he announces with a tight and angry face that he wants to “just pee on the ground.” He says he wants “to hit people and fight with everybody!”

After a time (perhaps 3 minutes) he says he is finished but wants to make a picture. The picture that follows is of himself and his dad on a camping trip, swimming and canoeing on the lake before his dad got sick. He is very proud and happy with his picture and asks if there is time to go out to play.

Who cannot empathize with this young child’s need to express violent anger at the tragic cards he was dealt? However, it was clear that the way in which Mrs. R. gently accompanied Kyle on his Elevator Ride, knowing that his situation could not be changed, allowed his felt sense to change from something hard to something soft. The physiological change is always noted in the shifts of these children. The behaviour that follows is generally calmer and more focused, tasks are completed and the intrinsic reward is evident.

A GIRL DEALS WITH FEARS AROUND A CUSTODY BATTLE

Please note the role anger plays in this last story about a fourteen-year-old girl called Madeleine, whose divorced parents are battling for custody of her. Madeleine’s guidance

teacher, Mr. B., who has been using Elevator Rides with students, was asked to work with Madeleine because she had become a destructive bully and stopped doing any schoolwork. Madeleine feels loyalty for both her parents.” I don’t want to hurt my mom and I don’t want to hurt my dad,” she says, adding “I feel like I am being torn apart.” “I can’t even open the door to the Elevator. It feels stuck and I can’t get in. Nobody is here to help me. I feel all alone.”

After a moment Madeleine reports, “I hear someone say ‘I’ll help you if you let me.’”. She seems surprised, saying angrily, “It is hard to believe that someone would help me because...the two people who should understand don’t!”

When she does finally get the door open and enters the Elevator she finds a small box that she cannot get into. “[The box] It feels like my heart, it is shutting itself up with duct tape. I feel really scared in my heart.”

Mr. B. suggests her heart might want to tell her how she needs to be with it. Her heart tells her there will never be a happy ending. She reports that she feels “sad, depressed and doomed.”

Mr. B. invites Madeleine to stay with those feelings and after a bit she reports seeing black zigzags all over the box, shutting it up even more tightly than the duct tape. The box wants to go away, she says, because “I am not telling it how I feel inside.”

Madeleine begins to shiver and complains of being very cold.

“I try to please my mom and dad and now my body is all cold and hard.” She continues to shiver and with her tears come the sorrowful words: “I would do just about anything to get out of this. I’d rather go back to being a child again.”

She continues with her eyes closed.

“I know now what kind of weight I am carrying. This heavy thick blubber is sewn on to me. If I take it off it will hurt and take me a long time to get over it.”

Her hand is now over her heart.

“Now my heart is covered up in the box and it feels like I could fall down and go somewhere.” Madeleine has stopped shivering now but her back feels cold. She says, “There is a thick string holding on to me and it left scars on my back. Even God is telling me there is no help to make my decision. Now I feel sad and alone.”

Her face looks as though she may cry but there are no tears.

“Everything is becoming clear but my heart is too tired to do anything. I don’t have any hope or faith anymore, just hopelessness.”

Her hands now lie palms up on her lap.

After sitting with how all that feels for several minutes, she reports: “The string attached to my back is trying to pull me up. It feels bittersweet. It is trying to encourage myself to stay confident.”

She ends the Elevator Ride composed and states emphatically, “I will try!”

There is no solution for Madeleine, but she does feel some resolution; she’s now capable of finding fresh energy to try to make the best of a situation that she has no control over,

and that is encouraging. When she moves from hopelessness to, “I will try”, I am reminded of the words of the late Christian mystic Thomas Merton, who once wrote to a friend about hopelessness.

“Do not depend on the hope of results you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no results at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. You gradually struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationship that saves everything.”

When we commit ourselves to helping children make these connections, and develop deeper personal relationships, both with self and others, they will be enabled and empowered to live in a healthy way with their fears. It is the presence of the very fear itself that offers the next step forward. In pursuing Focusing work both for ourselves and the children in our lives, we can live in hope, while simultaneously letting go of outcomes. It will be a journey of insecurity that takes us and the children for the future into this new way of being in a strange and foreign landscape. Focusing offers us no outcomes, only surprises! The task is at hand and lies waiting for those with the tools to trust and begin to risk introducing children to this great work. For the sake of the children in this difficult world, I encourage and challenge all who use Focusing to share it with a child. As Ed McMahon, author of *Beyond the Myth of Dominance* says, Focusing is “a process of gifting our children with themselves.” What a gift!

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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.

DEALING WITH VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL FEAR

Catherine Hudek

Having worked in the field of child abuse for 30 years, I became acquainted with vicarious traumatization through first hand experience before I even knew what it was. It wasn't until I entered Shirley Turcotte's 2-year certification program in the use of Focusing with PTSD that I learned the difference between vicarious traumatization and burnout.

Burnout can occur to anyone working long term in an emotionally demanding job where there is inadequate support, where the workload is unmanageable, or where the person lacks the training required to do the job effectively (Baird & Jenkins, 2003). The likelihood of burnout is associated more closely with the work environment than with the presence of a trauma history on the part of either the client or the therapist (Jackson, 1999). The effects of burnout can include emotional exhaustion, de-personalization and reduced feelings of accomplishment (Jackson, 1999). Burnout may be preventable on the organizational level, as lower levels are associated with factors such as adequate supervision, communication and positive feedback, as well as with manageable workload and adequate training.

Vicarious traumatization, on the other hand, is the result of the cumulative effect of traumatic material, and is now viewed as an inevitable effect of working with trauma survivors (Jackson, 1999). In the words of Judith Herman: "Trauma is contagious" (1992, p.140). Unlike burnout, vicarious traumatization is seen as resulting from "the interaction of the clinician's personal characteristics...along with the material presented by the client (Pearlman & Sackville, 1995)" (Cunningham, 2003, p. 452). Greater risk is associated with higher levels of exposure to traumatic material (Cunningham), and to a personal history of trauma on the part of the therapist (Jackson). Interestingly, a number of studies have found that the effects of vicarious traumatization are lower in therapists with more experience in working with trauma than in people new to this work (Cunningham; Jackson; Way, Van-Deusen, Martin, Applegate & Jandle, 2004). A higher level of education on the part of clinicians also is associated with fewer symptoms of vicarious trauma (Baird & Jenkins, 2003).

The effects of vicarious traumatization most commonly noted involve disruptions in the clinician's own cognitive schema, especially in the areas of safety, esteem, trust, intimacy, and control, both in regards to themselves and to others (Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Cunningham, 2003; Jackson, 1999). "These cognitive changes include heightened feelings of vulnerability, extreme sense of helplessness and or exaggerated sense of control, chronic bitterness, cynicism and alienation" (Gabriel, 2002). Other effects noted include obsession with the traumatic material, emotional numbing, generalized anxiety, and listlessness (Dolan, 1991), and "changes in the clinician's sense of self, spirituality, worldview, inter-personal relationships, and behavior (Chrestman, 1999; Freeman Longo, 1997; Kassam-Adams, 1999)" (Way et al., 2004 p. 49). For clinicians working with clients who suffer from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) there is a risk of developing symptoms of PTSD (Cunningham; Herman, 1992).

Another related construct is that of secondary traumatic stress. “Figley (1983) defined secondary traumatic stress, which he later called compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995), as the experiencing of emotional duress in persons who have had close contact with a trauma survivor, which may include family members as well as therapists” (Baird & Jenkins, 2003, p. 73). The main difference between this construct and that of vicarious traumatization is the recognition that family members of a trauma survivor can be affected.

While Judith Herman uses the terms “vicarious traumatization” and “traumatic countertransference” interchangeably (1992, p.140), “Counter transference differs from secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma in that counter transference focuses on the possible consequences of the counselor’s past experiences for the client. Secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma are concerned with the negative ramifications of exposure to the client for the counselor.” (Baird & Jenkins, 2003, p. 74)

All of these constructs: burnout, vicarious traumatization, secondary traumatic stress and counter transference, have features that overlap, and can have an interactional effect (Way et al, 2004).

The first definition of vicarious traumatization that I learned was from Shirley Turcotte, who provides a joint definition for vicarious traumatization (VT) and Secondary PTSD (SPTSD):

VT/SPTSD occurs when we are affected by the experiences and trauma stories of survivors of trauma. It is Cumulative (grows with time, number of exposures); inevitable and normal (an occupational hazard, not a sign of weakness); Developmental (changes over time though experiences). (Turcotte, undated)

This definition encompasses the major features described in the literature, and has the added strength of being both clear and normalizing.

The literature contains a number of suggestions for reducing the effects of vicarious traumatization, including: adherence to a therapy contract with clear goals, rules and boundaries (Herman, 1992), specialized training to raise awareness and recognition of vicarious traumatization (Cunningham, 2003; Way et al., 2004), support and supervision which allow clinicians to address the effects of vicarious traumatization without fear of judgement (Cunningham, 2003; Herman, 1992), balancing caseloads so that a reasonable percentage of workload involves clients other than trauma survivors (Dolan, 1991), personal therapy (Gabriel, 2002), and various self care strategies such as exercise, journal keeping, and time with family, friends and children (Gabriel).

My own personal experience, the training I received through the certification program in Focusing and PTSD, and the results of a study I completed in 2004 on the use of Focusing in the treatment of PTSD have combined to convince me that the attitude and skills of Focusing can be very effective in recognizing, healing from and even preventing the effects of vicarious traumatization.

When I entered the Focusing and PTSD certification program in September, 2000, I completed a PTSD symptom checklist along with other program participants. I was startled to discover that, at that time, I had sufficient symptoms to qualify for a diagnosis of PTSD. While I have a history of some personal trauma, symptoms of PTSD did not emerge until I had worked for many years with other trauma survivors. In spite of the severity of my symptoms at that time, I was able, in just a few Focusing sessions, to separate out my own personal baggage from my work with traumatized clients, tend to the old wounds, recognise the aspects of my work which were affecting me, and tend to my adult needs as a therapist. Within weeks, my symptoms had been reduced to sub-clinical levels, and within a couple of months they had resolved completely.

In the first Focusing session where I was paying attention to the vicarious trauma I realized that I was suffering from, I started by focusing on the symptom that was giving me the most difficulty in my daily life at that time: a feeling of breathlessness and panic whenever I contemplated returning to the kind of work I had been doing for so many years. Once I cleared everything else away and focused only on this I was able to notice my body's response to the prospect of returning to this work. It was a sharp pain in my throat that made it hard to breathe. By asking into this Felt Sense what it was that wanted to come up, and listening to what my body had to say, I was able to discover that an experience in my childhood, where I was witness to another child being mistreated, was the source of this panic I was experiencing in relation to the prospect of returning to work. By first attending to the unresolved feelings of guilt, helplessness, and failure that were associated with this early experience, I was then able to separate it out from my current problem, and notice how it had been triggered by a situation in my job where I was unsuccessful in my attempts to protect a child from an abusive adult. Dealing with the fact that, even as an adult in a position of responsibility for the protection of children, I was not infallible, and could not expect to succeed in every situation, was finally possible, once I got unstuck from the more extreme helplessness I had experienced as a child.

The Focusing and PTSD program taught how vicarious traumatization can affect not only individuals, but also entire organizations, with contempt, withdrawal, criticism and defensiveness spreading to all levels of the organization and resulting in an emotionally toxic work environment (Poonwassie, 2001).

In addition to recognition of signals of vicarious trauma, several strategies for reducing the effects of vicarious traumatization were addressed in the training. These include:

- Clearing A Space before entering a therapy session. This is useful for keeping your own issues separate from the client's as well as ensuring that you can be fully present with the client.
- Positioning yourself so that you are sitting next to or kitty-corner from the client during sessions, rather than directly across from the client. This allows you to avoid taking in negative emotional energy coming from the client, such as rage or terror regarding their traumatic experiences.

- Maintaining respect for your client's ability to heal and to deal with their own issues. This includes *not* leaping in and rescuing a client when crises arise.

- Clearing A Space again at the end of a therapy session, putting down the client's issues rather than carrying them with you.

- Honouring your own feelings, and allowing a safe time and place to deal with those. This includes maintaining a Focusing attitude of curiosity, openness and acceptance towards your feelings.

- Attending to your own triggers. Focusing is very useful in doing this, as described above.

- Self-care, self-nurturing, balance in life activities and within self, and connection to self, to others, and to something larger (eg. a purpose).

The research I completed in 2004 also supports the usefulness of Focusing skills in reducing the effects of vicarious traumatization. In this study, I interviewed 14 clinicians who were actively using Focusing in their treatment of trauma survivors. While vicarious traumatization was not the main topic of my study, several of the responses are relevant.

In response to the question "To what extent and in what ways do you use Focusing in your treatment of trauma survivors?"

All 14 participants described using the various steps of Focusing in a variety of ways. The step most commonly used on its own was Clearing Space, with 12 participants using this step themselves, as a way to clear aside their own issues prior to and/or just after a therapy session. Some of the purposes for therapists Clearing Space, included using it as a means to keep their own issues separate from the client's, reducing counter-transference, reducing vicarious traumatization, and enabling themselves to be fully present for the client. (p.77)

In addition, 7 of the therapists interviewed mentioned using Focusing sessions for themselves.

I still find as a Focuser, myself personally, would like to do more Focusing. You run into your own obstacles in life, and you need to be able to deal with those as well. If you are not dealing with them, how can you help someone else deal with them? (interview 13, p.79)

In response to the question, "What (if any) benefits have you noticed in using Focusing with these clients?" 2 of the numerous benefits identified are relevant to this topic. One related to the use of Clearing Space and/or other Focusing steps by and for the therapist.

I find myself, once I have used Focusing with myself, big changes. (interview 13, p. 89)

You are there, right there. You have to be able to be there and witness that and not take that on, and be the support, be the companion. You are right at the Felt Sense. You're right at the scene...so you have to be able to separate out everything that is yours. Only the part of you that needs to be there is there. (interview 1, p. 103)

The more that I do Focusing myself, the more comfortable I am with the ups and downs and shadows in my inner life, then the more I am able to be present with other people. (interview 5, p. 104)

Usually when I go into a session I'll clear out everything of my own too. I find that is really important, you know, to clear out your own self. So none of your influences and none of your biases get in the way. It makes you really present, very quiet and centered...less reactive, more interactive." (interview 9, p. 104)

For me I find that I am more focused, present for the client. I am not into my stuff and my triggers for my own stuff is not there, because I Clear Space before going in. (interview 11, p. 104)

Reduction of countertransference and/or vicarious traumatization was specifically mentioned as a benefit by 3 of the study participants.

[It provides] personal benefits as well. [I am] able to use it on self to manage stress and reduce counter-transference issues. (interview 4, p. 106)

It is very helpful for me after I do a session, because sometimes what they talk about is very heavy, very negative energy. When I am finished I am able to check inside [myself] and clear it out, so I can move again. (interview 11, p.106)

It's helpful in reducing the effects of working with trauma. You know there have been times when you are kind of feeling overwhelmed, you think is this mine...? It protects you too, because you can check and see. If it is not mine, I have got my own stuff. I certainly don't need to be carrying somebody else's. (interview 14, p.106)

While not all of the participants identified these particular benefits, it should be noted that questions specific to vicarious traumatization were not part of the interview format. This subject only came up when raised by the participants themselves.

Vicarious traumatization has been found in people working with sexual abuse survivors (Dolan, 1991; Jackson, 1999; Cunningham, 2003); Way et al, 2004), sexual abuse offenders (Way et al), survivors of the Nazi Holocaust (Herman, 1992), and combat veterans (Herman; Cunningham). It is reasonable to assume that there is a risk of vicarious

traumatization for anyone working closely with individuals who have suffered from experiences which meet Criterion A for diagnosis of PTSD, i.e. experiences involving “intense fear, helplessness or horror” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). If this is indeed the case, then volunteers and workers providing aid to refugees, or to survivors of natural disasters, terrorist acts, etc. are also at risk for vicarious traumatization.

It is this realization that gave me direction when I started contemplating doing some volunteer work during an upcoming trip to India and Southeast Asia. My plan is to offer training in the use of Focusing to reduce the effects of vicarious traumatization. This training will be offered to fellow volunteers and others who are working in relief efforts with traumatized individuals.

In some ways vicarious traumatization is now affecting a large segment of the population worldwide, at least in subtle ways. Graphic images of war, flood, famine, and now terrorism are brought into our living rooms through TV and other forms of media. An example of the subtle ways this affects our view of self, others and the world was brought home to me a few days ago with a story related by a colleague. She was at the airport, ready to embark on a flight, when she noticed some women who’s apparel clearly identified them as Muslim. Her first thought was “Oh, oh. Are we going to have some trouble here?” Being normally abhorrent of racism, she immediately caught herself, and turned the thought aside, but even having that reaction for a moment shocked her.

For many people, exposure to trauma is even closer to home. A study by McFarlane & Girolamo of a random sample of people in the southern US found that 69% of study subjects has experienced some form of traumatic (extreme) stress in their lives (1996). The numbers would likely even be higher now, after the terrifying event of 9/11 and the horrors brought on by Hurricane Katrina.

Focusing can be an antidote to the constant exposure to trauma we experience in today’s world, even for those who are not actively working with trauma sufferers. Focusing provides tools for separating out and containing, sorting, getting the right perspective and the right distance from whatever is troubling an individual, whether it be news stories about terrorism and disaster, a friend or family member who has suffered some personal trauma, or personal experience of trauma, whether far in the past, or more recently.

Clearing Space can be a powerful tool for keeping perspective and reconnecting with the authentic self. The Focusing Attitude of curiosity (friendly interest), openness and acceptance (Gendlin, 1996) is a healing attitude that can be helpful to anyone in attending to the effects of vicarious traumatization whether for themselves or for others.

As my own experience shows, even when the effects of vicarious trauma are extreme, and exacerbated by a personal trauma history, Focusing Oriented Therapy that is adapted to meet the unique needs of people suffering from PTSD is a safe, gentle and efficient form of therapy.

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APPENDIX: CLEARING SPACE: A PRIMER

Catherine Hudek

We all have a tendency to internalize and carry with us various unresolved issues, plans, problems or concerns, from the mundane tasks of daily life, such as: “What should I cook for supper tonight?” to the kinds of concerns that are potentially life changing, such as: “Should I accept that job offer even though it will require a move?” Whether it is a wedding in the planning stages, an upcoming interview, a recent conflict or some disturbing or even some joyful news, we have all experienced feeling preoccupied or distracted by what we are carrying, at least from time to time. Many of us have also experienced occasions when what we are carrying around is too much, and we feel scattered or overwhelmed.

Clearing Space is the process of externalizing, or *putting down* all of this internal baggage. This has two major benefits. First, it allows you to experience the *authentic self*, and separate your own identity from those things that, while affecting you, are not really part of who you are. Who people who have been overwhelmed by all of the problems or tasks they are juggling, having even a few minutes of rest from all of that, and being able to check in with themselves, and ask: “How am I doing?” can be therapeutic in itself. Secondly, once you have Cleared Space, it is possible to focus *all* of your attention on just one thing, and you can choose what that thing is.

Clearing Space, like all of the steps of Focusing, is a natural process. Many people actively Clear Space in their daily lives. The ability to keep work and home life separate is one example. Sometimes Clearing Space happens naturally and without effort, as when we become so absorbed in something that it *pushes out* everything else.

The following is a process you can follow to Clear Space. Hopefully, it will be easy to follow, even if this is new to you.

Clearing Space can be done anywhere and in any position, but it is useful when starting out, to sit or recline comfortably, in a place relatively free from distractions.

Take a few moments to relax and pay attention to your breathing. You may want to close your eyes if you are comfortable with that and it helps you concentrate. Let your breathing become deep and regular. Bring all of your attention to the trunk of your body. While doing this, ask inward, directing the question into your body rather than your head: “What am I carrying that isn’t part of *me*?” Alternatively, you could ask: “What is in the way of feeling peaceful and clear?” Feel free to alter the words in whatever way works for you.

You then wait, with a Focusing attitude of friendly curiosity, openness, and willingness to accept whatever comes up, without judgement.

When something does come up, don’t engage with it, or try to analyze it. Rather, ask, again, into the trunk of your body: “Where do I want to put this for now?” and then put it

there. If something has trouble *staying put*, you can create a container for it, or ask into your body: “What does this need in order to stay put?” It may need to be placed closer, or a little further away. It may need a commitment that, at some point, you will pick it back up and pay attention to it. Again, wait for the answer to come up from your body, and then act on it.

Once you have successfully put this down somewhere outside of you, you then repeat the process. It is usually sufficient at this point to just ask into your body: “Is there more?”

You go through the same process with each thing that comes up, deciding where and how to place each, until there is nothing more that comes up.

If, at this stage, you do not feel clear, calm and peaceful, check to see if there is a background feeling or issue, something that you may have carried for so long that it seems like a part of you, though it is not. Clear that in the same way you cleared everything else, noticing, but not engaging with it, finding the right place and the right container, if a container is needed.

You have now successfully Cleared Space. Take a bit of time just to enjoy the peace of being free of all of that clutter, and say hello to the real *you* that may have been hidden under all of that.

Now that you have cleared space, you can choose to bring back into your attention one of the things that you cleared away, and focus *all* of your attention on it. Giving any issue or problem your undivided attention is the best way to arrive at meaningful answers. This is why Clearing Space is always the first step in Focusing, even though the other steps may follow in an order that is more flexible. Using Focusing as a way of paying attention to that issue or concern allows you to pay attention in the most meaningful way possible. Focusing assesses not just your thoughts, but *all* of your inner knowledge, even that which can not be put easily into words, and that which is connected or relevant in ways that may not occur to a person who is using their head rather than their body in attending to a problem. Our bodily felt sense of a problem will also go straight to the *most* relevant knowledge. It is like having a really great “sort and find” program for the archives of information in our immense memory systems. Focusing allows us also to use the whole of ourselves, heart, mind, body, and spirit, which is much more powerful than using the mind alone.

**CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION:
A MODEL FOR A NEW PATTERN OF RELATING
AN APPLICATION OF STOPPED PROCESS, LEAFING, AND CROSSING**

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INTRODUCTION

Doralee Grindler Katonah

As far back as I can remember I have been drawn to people from “different” cultures. I can recall this rich thick feeling when I was 11 and our Sunday school class participated in a Passover meal at a local synagogue. I still taste that first encounter with the maror — the bitter herb symbolizing the harshness of slavery, and the charoset (chopped walnuts, grated apples, cinnamon, sweet red wine) symbolizing the mortar used by Jewish slaves to build storehouses in Egypt, and the matzo (unleavened bread) a humble remembrance of our freedom. Tasting this new world of meaning brought a sense of awe and wonder.

When I was 19 I lived in Kenya for three months. I was part of a cross-cultural program. Twelve of us lived in a house made of mud in the Kenyan bush and worked with the local people to build a science laboratory for a high school. We mixed the sand, baked the bricks in the sun, and worked with local carpenters to build the walls of the science lab. Through this encounter with people who did not share my cultural assumptions and patterns, something new opened up inside me as I struggled to reach beyond my cultural backdrop to connect with the people of Kenya and try to understand their world. In order to do this, I had to communicate from a ‘feel’ within me that didn’t fit my usual pattern of communication. I discovered that if I could find a sense in my body of how I wanted to be, I could reach from there and experience a touching between people that was extraordinarily alive. I’ve had many more moments like this through my continued travels and cross-cultural encounters.

In his book *Thinking Through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology*, the cultural anthropologist Richard Shweder (1991) talks about these kinds of encounters:

p. 1 “If there is a piety in cultural anthropology it is the conviction that astonishment deserves to be a universal emotion. Astonishment and the assortment of

feelings that it brings with it — surprise, curiosity, excitement, enthusiasm, sympathy — are probably the affects most distinctive of the anthropological response to the difference and strangeness of ‘others.’ (p. 1) “...(difference) is not something we need to resolve; it is something we need to seek, so that through astonishment we may stay on the move between different worlds, and in that way become more complete.” (p. 19)

Cultural crossings open possibilities for further development. Perhaps it is a universal desire to be “nomadic”, to seek out different worlds, motivated not just by survival but also by a deep curiosity, the desire for ‘more’, the engagement of potential that is activated in encountering our differences.

Yet it is also true that difference can be threatening, leading to a categorizing of “us and them,” to stereotypes and the tendency towards domination and oppression of those who are of a different skin color, religion, sexual orientation, or cultural practice. We can no longer hide behind these assumed separations and hegemonies. Although we continue to think in terms of “different cultures” they are not static self-contained ways of living. Rather, cultures are alive in their crossings and evolutions.

Diversity lives within us as well. It isn’t accurate to think of each person as from one culture, one race, or one religion. As John McLeod states (2005, p. 50): “Very few of us can claim to be unequivocally a member of a single culture. Our parents, our grandparents, may represent contrasting religious or ethnic communities. The trajectory of our lives may have brought us into contact with different cultural ideas and practices.”

This seeking the ‘more’ through engagement of differences is something we as a Focusing community thrive upon. These cross-cultural openings are occurring all the time at The Focusing Internationals where focusers from many different cultures come together and encounter each other through our common capacity to process felt meaning. I’ve wondered what happens differently in cross-cultural communication as a result of this shared knowing about Focusing. What can happen in a cross-cultural communication when what is felt on an implicit level is symbolized and expressed? In a Focusing exchange something happens between people that carries *each* person’s felt experiencing forward *differently than it may when Focusing with someone from the same culture. Both people are changed through differences becoming a bridge for further symbolization of each person’s felt sense.*

Gendlin’s Philosophy of the Implicit gives us a rich framework for understanding this capacity for development that thrives on the interaffecting of cultures. In “Focusing-oriented” cross-cultural communication we have the ability now to move from the meanings captured in language and culture to the bodily implying of further meaning, felt but not yet symbolized. Perhaps this new pattern of relating will enable meanings to be carried forward through an interaction with a cultural difference — that could not be carried forward otherwise, such that diversity will become something to seek out as an avenue for human development.

The purpose of this paper is to present three examples of cross-cultural Focusing, two from a workshop I conducted last year at The International in The Netherlands, and one that was shared via the discussion list. I hope that they will demonstrate the rich potential for this kind of Focusing that enables new meanings to emerge that could not form without experiences of cultural crossings. To frame these examples I will briefly describe how I have applied Gendlin's concepts of 'stopped process', 'leafing' and 'crossing' to help understand and appreciate why Focusing is an avenue for a special kind of human development that can occur through cross-cultural encounters. It is my hope that this will be seen as one model for a new pattern of relating that moves us beyond fear, polarization, and stereotyping, to a way of experiencing difference, that carries each person forward to greater respect for and openness to all living beings.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS:

How should we think about the *relationship* between the person and culture? In Eugene Gendlin's *Philosophy of the Implicit*, culture is defined as "the structure of situations, the patternings of human interactions" (Gendlin, 1997, p. 17). Living is not just instinctual — humans generate symbolic meanings that become objects, rituals, tools, expressions, patterns of relating and living (for example, restaurants, market places, forms of government, songs, etc.). These shared expressions of meaning become our environment. Cultures are creative expressions of meaning shared by groups of people. Human beings live in relation to their own creations. (Grindler Katonah, 2005, p. 66).

Always at the same time, living process is an interaction between the person and the culture. Living processes are fundamentally unfinished. What is felt on an implicit level carries a multiplicity of unfinished "potential patterns for further interactions with our environment." (Gendlin, 1962, p. 25) Thus, it is our ability to further symbolize our fresh living beyond known patterns that forms the basis for this new pattern of relating that thrives on diversity. Felt meaning in interaction with something different in the 'other' carries forward a personal meaning that could not be lived without this engagement.

STOPPED PROCESS:

In Gendlin's *A process model* (1997a) he thinks about how it is that life can carry forward while at the same time, some processes do not carry forward. This is always occurring. You want to communicate with a new person at The International but you don't speak English. You have a sense of 'wanting but can't carry forward through my usual way of communicating.' This process is stopped, but you go on living in other ways, perhaps by talking with others from your own country. Yet this stopped process continues to imply a carrying forward. There is something here between these two people that wants to be lived, even though, as of yet, there is no way forward. What is sensed as a felt sense also goes beyond language. It includes nonverbal meanings and meanings that have never been put into words.

Stopped process may occur for many reasons. Whatever the reason, the implying continues to be there. What wants to carry forward remains even as life goes on. We all can recall

something in ourselves that may have been stopped for years, and then something interacts with that felt sense to carry it forward in a new way. I am thinking of someone who, as a child wanted to become a singer. It wasn't until she was 50 that this stopped process was able to carry forward through her learning to give attention to that sense of 'wanting to sing'. Through a series of action steps she began to perform professionally.

Gendlin reveals something profound about stopped process. He differentiates that exactly at the juncture of a "stopped process" a felt potential for a new development arises. When the usual way a process that is carried forward is stopped, the organism remains sensitized, and has the potential to find new possibilities for carrying this forward that would not have been discovered if this particular process was not stopped. It is also true that as a new development arises, the original process no longer can occur in the same way it did before. For example, perhaps the two people who couldn't speak the language of the other — that evening when the music was playing — began to dance together and laugh, and a new felt sense emerged for each of them, opening a new meaning. Even if the next day a translator helped them communicate verbally, the shared experience of dancing, and what that carried forward in each of them, will have already changed the felt senses from which they originally wanted to communicate.

In the case of cross-cultural interactions, a stopped process happens because the usual cultural patterns cannot be carried forward. It is exactly at the juncture of a stopped process that a further development becomes possible. This is where the aliveness is!

LEAFING:

Leafing describes the complexity of what happens when we have a stopped process. As stated above, in this situation the organism stays under the conditions of the stopped process and the body becomes more sensitized. Now something new in the environment is able to interact with the stopped process, something that would not have been noticed before the stoppage. Leafings are bits of process occurring only just as far as they can while still not yet carried forward so each time again is the first bit.

In these bits of process (or leafing), there is potential for more ways in which the environment could carry forward the stopped process, but differently than before. Felt meaning includes stopped process and includes this increased sensitization. Thus, in a cross-cultural exchange, the number of possible ways to carry forward increases, beyond the known ways within one's own culture. I think of the Dalai Lama and the colonization of the Tibetan people, including the destruction of monasteries and temples and the suppression of religion. This is a tragically significant stopped process in the ongoing living of Buddhism amongst the Tibetan people and the continuation of the Tibetan culture. Now living in India, the Dalai Lama and his community demonstrate leafing. The incredibly various ways in which Buddhism is now being carried forward all over the world may be emerging from this increased sensitization right at the juncture of stopped process. They now bring Buddhism into interaction with various groups of people-around the world. (For example, see Kamenetz, 1995)

CROSSING:

To understand ‘crossing’ it may help to recall that Focusing is the interaction between felt meaning and symbolization. Felt meaning carries an unseparated multiplicity of unfinished, potential meanings. Symbolization is a known or articulated meaning carried in words, images, gestures, objects, etc. ‘Crossing’ describes how symbolization functions in interaction with felt meaning to bring forward a potential meaning that is freshly lived in the new situation. We know that in Focusing there is a discovery of a symbolization (word, phrase, image, gesture, etc.) that resonates with the felt sense and functions to further explicate felt meaning. However, it can sound like the symbol identifies what is there in the experiencing. The idea of ‘crossing’ heightens our awareness that there is a more complicated process going on, involving not only change in the felt meaning, but also change in the meaning of the symbol through this interaction of known symbol with new situation. Once the symbol crosses with the felt sense, it means everything it did before — plus what is revealed about this fresh current situation. Felt meaning carries the current situation as something more than what language had revealed before. “In this situation the word says how new features come — in a crossing of word and situation.” (Gendlin, 1997b, p. 2).

I have found it helpful to apply the concept of ‘crossing’ to cross-cultural interactions. In such an interaction there is first the “new situation” that does not fit within the cultural meanings known by each person in the interaction. What we bring to this interaction can include our stereotypes, prejudices, and fears of the difference. It can also include a ‘something more’ that is evoked by the difference. The felt experience of the other is *already* a fresh symbolization, as each person is something more than the general view of each culture. So the encounter itself is a ‘crossing’ as the usual meanings (both of one’s own culture and of the different culture) cross with the fresh experience of the person before you. The person comes forth through the crossing, which also changes the understanding of the culture. With the introduction of cross-cultural Focusing we create a situation in which Focusing allows the explication of new symbolizations that also furthers human connection.

“We can understand each other, across different experiences and different cultures, because by crossing we create in each other what neither of us was before. Communication and making sense does not rest on pre-existing commonalities, as if we can understand only what we already know. Nor is it misunderstanding and distortion. Rather, when we are precisely and exactly understood, that is when we are most eager to hear how it has crossed in the other person.” (Gendlin: Crossing and Dipping: p. 559.)

Cross-cultural communication has now become a new avenue for human development that is encouraged by the whole Focusing community. The world is searching for new patterns of relating that enable us to engage differences in such a way that difference functions to further our development and contribute to global community and peaceful, creative living.

As you read the following three Focusing stories I invite you to wonder where the ‘stopped process’ is, what might you identify as ‘leafing’, and what is the impact of this capacity we have for ‘crossing’. Notice the forms each process takes for each person. In Edgardo’s story there are two major stopped processes that cross in him: his relationship to his American family, and the end of democracy in his country. In Lucy’s story you can see how our capacity for crossing formed in her a unique bicultural identity that moved into a living in the world that is more than either. In Josine’s story, leafing included her felt sense of the kindness of the Japanese women that was functioning implicitly without any verbal exchange between her and the Japanese focusers.

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AN EXPERIENCE OF CROSS-CULTURAL LEAFING

Edgardo Riveros

(Translation: Beatrice Blake and J.A. Briones)

In Doralee Grindler Katonah's workshop in the Netherlands, May, 2006, I uncovered an experience that had been hidden and apparently forgotten, which had deeply affected my feelings and my relationship with the North American world. When I was a teenager, I attended a high school as an International exchange student while living with my North American host family. I had received a scholarship to attend this high school in Ohio from 1967-68, and my host family welcomed me into their home. This time that I spent living in America was during the cold war and despite the fondness and admiration that we had for each other, I argued a lot with my American brother Dick (we both were 17 years old) about U.S. politics and foreign policy, especially toward countries of the third world. In spite of the fraternal love I felt for them, I was aware that both Dick and my North American father agreed with and supported the U.S. air espionage on Cuba and the Soviet Union that was going on at the time. They also openly supported the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. They were members of the Republican Party and admired Richard Nixon.

When I left for Chile in August 1968, I sadly said goodbye to my North American family. I was very far from anticipating the historical events that would take place five years later in Chile, and how this would make me even more distant from them emotionally.

In November 1968, the favorite candidate of my North American family, Richard Nixon, won the U.S. presidential elections. We kept on writing to each other and communicating, especially at Christmas, from 1969 until 1973. When Chile suffered the coup d'état on September 11, 1973, I knew, as did many other students and intellectuals, that the North American aid to Allende's opponents had been key to their success in restoring a military tyranny that would last 17 years. Nixon and Kissinger had trained and supported the future *golpistas* (*coup participants*) from 1970 until 1973.

As Harold Pinter indicates in an interview with David Edwards in 2005:

*There is a lot that has been published on Internet recently. The one thing the US has is this Freedom of Information Act — it's not very good really because they black almost everything out, but they can't black everything out — you have to grant that: they have it, it is there, so it can be used, whereas here, as you know, the whole thing is a farce, it's disgraceful. But at least they've got something there and a while ago I obtained state documents about the CIA, about the US government involvement in the military coup in Chile. It's all there!**

* David Edwards. *Unthinkable Thoughts — an Interview with Harold Pinter* Medialens. Traducción de Germán Leyens. Revisión de Déborah Gi

There are documents from the North American Senate that demonstrate that U.S. infiltration in Chilean politics was continuous from the election of Frei Montalva in 1964. When I learned this, I was in a state of emotional shock that extended towards any event that had anything to do with the United States. I watched powerlessly as our state house, La Moneda, the symbol of our traditional democracy, was bombed with the collaboration of the North American Air Force. I remember going to see the debris of what had been the Presidential Palace. I kept a pencil-size piece of burnt wood in my shirt pocket as a memory of the painful morning of September 15, 1973. I was part of a long line of the people that passed in front of the Presidential Palace that day. We were like a crowd of mourners saying our last farewells at the grave of our democracy.

During this personal funeral of our democracy I felt a great silence form about my critical observation against those who destroyed this national building. I started to separate from my real feelings about the North American world and my feeling about my stay in the U.S. a couple of years before this tragedy. I felt so ashamed of being a part of those who believed that something like this would never happen. I suddenly knew about the military Air Force, the connection with the Nixon international policy, and his concern about Chile. I felt at the same time, that a big world of silence started to move as a gigantic sea wave over my sorrows. This mega wave covered my feelings against Nixon, against those who thought like him, my American brother, and the military people who helped to make this horror a real issue. A great distance started to build up between the guards and myself, between the Chilean police and me, and between the Chilean people and the world people who were in agreement with this horror. That's where I was, right at that moment.

I stopped writing to my North American family. I suffered as I watched the political persecution. There were tanks that attacked Santiago's most marginal populations. I went on my bicycle to see with my own eyes how they broke into the houses, provoking fear and panic throughout the area. Something powerful within drove me. I need to see with my own eyes — to become a witness to this violence. I wanted to be sure that this hell was really happening.

During this time, as a therapist in training, I became self-educated and experiential. I was working with a new theory that I had read by a brilliant man called Eugene Gendlin. I helped my friends with the first lessons of experiential psychothera. After long months of subjugation to militaristic propaganda and curfew — that lasted 11 uninterrupted years — I was learning to shut up, to stop thinking truthfully, so that my words would not give me away. I learned how to be quiet at meal-time and to be with my felt sense of suffering, without knowing what really was going on inside the Chilean society. I lived inside with the experience of “being-outside”, of “being-no-where”. I would disguise my words in order to survive in the concentration camp called Chile. Even the English language bothered me. I only could stand to read English written by Eugene Gendlin, and the followers of Carl Rogers, or large-spirited humanistic thinkers like Sidney Jourard and Rollo May.

I experienced a deep anger and disappointment toward those who had generated this sinister state, towards those that justified what they didn't understand, or preferred not to know: the participation of the United States of America and its government. I silenced myself systematically and stopped writing to my North American family. And thus twenty long years

of silence passed, years of becoming accustomed to and adapting to the facts. I stopped writing poetry, stopped reading the newspapers, and devoted myself to studying Greek and Latin, during the first months of the dictatorship. I walked along the streets of Santiago, a city without life — or without spontaneous life. It was a city abandoned by happiness and authenticity. I watched the leaves of the trees fall slowly for a long time. A deep pain and far-reaching distrust were growing inside me each day, like a wild jungle that became subjugated and then abandoned. Still my life went on. I got married and had two children, and continued to study Gene Gendlin and Viktor Frankl. I really lived as if in a concentration camp.

I was employed at a public clinic as a psychologist diagnosing abandoned children, and at the same time I was applying the new experiential paradigm. I started reading Víctor Frankl along with the first writings of Gendlin published between 1962 and 1970. These authors were for me like secret guardians of life and freedom, of the real feelings within me that were becoming more and more clandestine, both in myself and in my homeland. At that time, I felt I had to create a wall to the inner access of these buried feelings of freedom and life. Gendlin and Frankl gave meaning to my life and to my professional duties, far from the academic environment. I applied them organizationally and educationally, both in my clinical and private practices.

In this way I lived through this bitter experience that reached the depths of content, which had remained frozen in the vast territory of the implicit. I wanted to meet Eugene Gendlin, and thanks to a Chicago workshop on dreams, I decided to travel to the USA in October 1989. One night I dreamt I was with my brother Dick at his Presbyterian Church. Why he invited me, I did not know. In August of that year I decided to write to my North American family to re-establish contact. Twenty years had passed. When I was with my American family again, I asked to go to their church. Dick also was there to support me — together. I knew I was making a dream become real. I did not know that this matter was still unfinished until 2006, in the Netherlands.

THE REUNION AND THE HEALING OF THE SUFFERING

When I embraced them on arrival, time passed very quickly. My ‘parents’ were thrilled and happy to see me. They thought that I had died during the coup d’état. I found out that they had gone to the public information system in the small city of Marietta, Ohio, to see if I appeared in the lists of casualties during the events of 1973. They were very well informed about the repression that had happened in Chile. I felt their love, and was surprised by this concern for me.

There I understood the unfair generalizations I had made when I blamed them for what their government did in Chile. They were, certainly average and very well-intentioned citizens. They would never have believed nor imagined that what happened in Chile had been so serious and so atrocious. They never judged nor analyzed in a critical way what their government had done in the middle of the cold war, and even less in Chile in 1973.

I could not show them all my bad feelings toward Nixon’s government, or what was happening in Latin America. I could not express my protest to anybody. Again, I hid the sor-

row in my heart regarding this perverse Cold War that the superpowers had invented, as they fought for world hegemony. This intimate protest kept on wandering around in my inner universe dressed in autumn colors. Outwardly, it tainted the scenery with indifference or irony, towards all the political topics of the cold war. I was intimately protesting this cold war. I wanted to demand an apology from the U.S. government and the Chilean dictatorship to the people of Chile; to the natural relationship which took place once a upon a time in Marietta, Ohio in 1967 and 1968, between two friends who became brothers of a world fraternal relationship; and to a kind American family who gave their love and their home to a Chilean teenager looking for a World of understanding.

At that time, it seemed to me that my North American family cured me of this suffering with their love and their warm welcome. Nevertheless, my sorrow and its meaning did not end completely until Dr. Doralee Grindler Katonah's innocent workshop on "cross cultural leafing" in Netherlands in 2006.

THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

I had not been able to communicate my real feelings for fear of offending my loved ones. I realized that there was also fear related to self-preservation in Chile that contributed to suppressing these feelings. I had buried my suffering in the soul of the experiential. Intellectually, I believed I had overcome the trauma of 1973. In that workshop with Doralee, I made a beautiful discovery. I found it in a deep well that had been camouflaged as a treasure. As I closed my eyes, I found a deep well and went to a deeper level of the sea where I found a golden box. Then I touched it, and suddenly it opened up. I started to cry as I felt that old sadness, those horror feelings of 1973. As I stayed with this old sadness, inside those feelings was the image of my brother Dick. I saw him crying with me in that long line of the people that passed in front of the Presidential Palace that memorable day at the funeral of our Chilean democracy. Then in the empathic context of the workshop, I realized that all my suffering had stayed without context and without a voice; that is to say, my meaning had remained frozen, like a cry that hoped to be heard and listened to some day — by the right people in the right context. It was a sob that remained suspended in the crossed wires of a transcultural goal to be heard and understood by my American brother. In the intercultural breach, I was left without the appropriate "others", ones that might understand my language and my sensations of pain. My brother was the "other one", and the context was "that long line of people," a sob that remained suspended in the crossed wires of a Transcultural goal.

An arduous but beneficial task awaits us in this intercultural dimension. When we don't find our meanings, we are like immigrants without a definite existence, without identity, and as yet undiscovered. I believe that Focusing can be a bridge to connect the significant others with the *now* right context.

I believe that Eugene Gendlin gave me, without knowing it, a space and an opportunity to visit the United States with an excellent excuse: to finally meet him personally.

The meeting with Gene happened on October 29, 1989; one week before the Berlin Wall fell. My reunion with my dear North American family took place thanks to the fact that

I had discovered Focusing. I would not have known Focusing if I had not been in the USA in 1968, the year that Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were murdered — and if I had not woken up to my own awareness that we were entering to a new era, an age of political violence and of a carnivorous globalization of humankind.

We lived through a historical process of the Cold War and of deep changes. I think we are now coming to a moment in history where the human experience is stirred to look for a respectful solution and for healthy coexistence between diverse cultures, without thinking about the hegemony of any nation in particular. Focusing helped me to grow into a vision of intercultural relating, that has the potential to break through the current destructive ways where governments try to impose their will on other cultures.

Focusing has been for me — among other things — a bridge to cross the intercultural border, a possibility of understanding a new order of things in futuristic texts like Gene's writings. Focusing is a way to foster PEACE through a real discovery of respect for diversity, so that all people may choose their future and identity in the world with complete harmony and sovereignty. Focusing stimulates the discovery of personal and cultural singularity, the right to be a person, and a right to *be* in a specific unique culture.

In today's world the practice of intercultural respect, the shared experience of diversity, and the understanding of a new implicit order are more urgent than ever. They can give us light in the darkness of violence, discrimination, and manipulation.

Focusing is a viable way to reach that authenticity because it allows us to discover our sorrows, often hidden in the deep well of words not spoken.

— Chile, August 2006

SOME THOUGHTS ON MY OWN 'STOPPED PROCESS' AND 'LEAFING'

Lucy Bowers

I received a birthday gift on the weekend. The title was *This Is My Country, What's Yours?* I didn't even have to open it to get that twinge of the Felt Sense back, a leftover from my experience last May at the Focusing Conference in Holland. The question of what a country is and my relationship to it seems to have been lurking somewhere in my blood and bones for many decades. Is this about the location? The geography? The society? The language? The culture? What exactly is a country and how do I belong to it?

Most of my life I have been calling myself a Canadian. That is what my passport proves to those who care to know. Others ask for my driver's license to ascertain my iden-

tity. It seems helpful to let it be known where I live. There are many other attributes that I can claim to show I am Canadian for example, I am reminded about getting my income tax completed one of these days. I was just having a conversation with my uncle in Holland on the telephone and he made me aware that the winter there is very mild and benevolent and bicycles are still used by the majority. Compare that to the Arctic winds blowing bitterly cold here all week, making us dress in layers and consider seriously whether or not we really need to leave the warmth of our homes. That huge difference between his experience and mine certainly makes me a Canadian.

I was born in Amsterdam during the war. The city was in the last throes of dying without food, without hope. Basic needs for warmth, shelter and nurturing of any kind, emotional, physical or social was not available to my parents struggling to make sense of that world in which they were having their first child. It cannot be surprising that they and many, many others left the horrors of their memories and their bleak landscape of loss to restart their lives on a fresh new page called Canada a few years later. The word "Canadian" for a little eight year old girl held some mystical, magical qualities that allowed it to be alright to let go of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, food, language and a landscape that all declared that she was a little Dutch girl.

I was convinced by the deliberate way in which my family flew away by airplane, leaving a tearful family behind never to see again, how fortunate we were to be embarking on this journey of becoming Canadians! The tears of my mother were discounted and completely misunderstood as we posed at the door of the airplane to smile and wave our last goodbye (what we were told) and to ignore the wetness of our own smiling faces.

I especially allowed the idea of being Canadian to consolidate in me while I was teaching overseas for 8 years with N.A.T.O. Here I was driving my French car with license plates that declared I was from Canada, and had the maple leaf in bright red ensconced in the corners to prove it. I traveled into every corner of Europe with a visibility that provided me with a sense of pride and belonging unlike anything I had ever experienced before then. My understanding of being Canadian seemed to grow and bloom as I made memories in so many places that did not have any resemblance to my country called Canada. There was no wilderness to be found and the wildlife was rather tame, add to that the different languages, the variety of foods and drinks, the music and the customs. I was continually reminded in a most wonderful way that I was indeed a foreigner and loving it. Even the country where I had been born and spent the first eight years of my life had no resonance with my identity as a Canadian. I was a Canadian visiting Holland. I did have family there and I did relearn the language; I was drawn to go there often and yet each time I saw myself as a Canadian only.

I was happy to meet the family I had left as a little girl, both pleased and grateful for the opportunities to spend time with aunts, uncles, and cousins but I had after all learned to grow up just fine without their influences on me. I often would try to imagine in some way how it would have been for me had we never moved to Canada. I understood my world view was very different from my cousins and was grateful for how I had experienced my life as a Canadian.

The experience of 8 years in Europe as an adult allowed me to appreciate even more the gift of being Canadian. It amplified for me why I cherished Canada as my country and

appreciated with gratitude the choice my parents had made to move there. Nothing in Europe as beautiful and unique as it was, could compare to what we had in Canada it seemed to me. Each country we had the privilege to become acquainted with, seemed not to encompass all of what we knew we missed in the country I called home.

The souvenirs I came back from Europe with were more than memories, photos and the tangible things that I placed in my home back in Canada. I came back with a husband and two children. My husband (a Canadian teacher like myself) and I met there, were married there, had our family there and then came back with a huge new awareness and sense of privilege to begin our lives back home. Within a few short years we decided to have a Canadian souvenir, so another son was born. There were times when he and his dad enjoyed reminding the rest of us that they were the “real” Canadians because they had been born in Canada. Here was a little bit of my personal history repeating itself. My birth family was born in Holland with the exception of the youngest, my little sister. She too found it important on many occasions to remind the rest of us that she was the “real” Canadian. So what was that about? Did I feel as though I was a “real” Nederlander because I was born there? Not really. Does being born in a country make it yours? I never really thought that.

The first time I began to ponder this was when I returned to Amsterdam as a Focuser. Now I knew how to attend to my felt sense. The sounds, the smells, the sights were having a big impact on me the day I was showing off the city I was born in, to my friend. Happily I was able to do some Focusing around how deep in my tissues there was a connection to this landscape and for the first time I found myself questioning how simple it had been for me to define myself as a Canadian and yet...something vague and undefined was stirring in me.

On the occasion of the International Focusing Conference held in The Netherlands, 2006, something new began to happen within me during this time back in Holland. I was back in the country of my birth once more as a Focuser. It was a weeklong of Focusing with the energy of many (approx. 200) from around the world who were there sharing my passion for Focusing. I was very aware of my felt senses as I was immersed in the language of my childhood, the smells of cheeses and fish, the lushness of the landscape, the windmills, the rich abundance of flowers everywhere, the way the houses looked, the people who seemed to look like relatives, and those birds...they were just not the birds I ever heard back in Canada in the spring. The sounds of those birds seemed bent on taking me back. Those many mating birds singing their love songs back and forth took me back to a time when I had lived there and not been a visitor, to a time when I had a sense of belonging, with my very own grandmother and an abundance of aunts, uncles and cousins that were not pretend, unlike those friends of my parents back in Canada. Those days of my childhood when I was not marked as different or an intruder, days when I did not have an accent when I spoke, were the days reminding me of a time long dead in me but now had an appearance of waking up and offering me a sense of joy and security and mostly, I seem to want to use the words “belonging again.”

Just before the conference, there was a big, festive, celebration day for the Queen. Seeing the orange banners hanging from all the homes flooded me with memories of when I saw the Queen walk by me and my school friends as a little girl. I felt a sense of belonging once more that I found hard to explain. All these many “awarenesses” were gently waking

up in me slowly with each of my daily focusing sessions. There was a rich felt-ness that permeated my whole body, like I was living fresh the “me” that lived here as a child, the “me” that had been buried under “Canadian”.

The little micromoments in time, like the sound of a Dutch conversation, a bird singing, the smell of a particular food, are just examples of the unexpected stirrings in my heart each time. Something in me bit by bit, day by day, was opening me up to the notion that I was not just a Canadian attending this conference.

It was at the Reconciliation Evening that my heart fully opened up. It hurt and it hurt a lot. Something very big began to happen when Erna De Bruin shared her story. While she was talking about her teenage experience during the war I became very hot. I was uncomfortable and could not explain what was happening but I savored a sense of inexplicable connection. The image came to me that both Erna and I were standing in a river together. This felt both exciting but confusing for me because the water felt very hot and uncomfortable. I felt compelled and curious to stay with this uncomfortable bodily sense as the evening unfolded.

The conference included a reconciliation ceremony commemorating the time and place (Wageningen) where on May 5, 1945 the Nazi occupation of Nederland ended and the country was set free. While watching a photograph review of that day, I was riveted by a picture of the Dutch flag blowing in the wind. I felt tightness in my chest at the sight of it. I was aware I was still standing in that river and feeling very hot. Not much had shifted since Erna had spoken and I was feeling vulnerable and open from the other stories that were told. It was a kind of Remembrance Day ceremony such as I had attended every year as a Canadian with my own children as well as with my little students. However this was the wrong flag, I saw the wrong uniforms and the wrong kind of bugle was playing. It was also the wrong feeling. There was not the sense of pride I experienced as a Canadian; the liberators of Holland! I had never experienced this sense of horror, violation, destruction, confusion and sadness before. Tears were streaming down my face and my chest was swelling up with some strange mixture of remorse and loss, much of it was hard to explain. I found myself thinking about my father (he had worn a similar uniform and helmet as a fire fighter in Holland as what we were seeing on the screen) who had died more than 40 years ago and had never spoken of his experience of the war. I thought fondly of one of my uncles, who had been a prison guard during the war in the exact prison shown on the screen, (and died twenty years ago) but had been compelled to share many stories of his experience whenever I had been to visit in the '70's. Then I recalled the two Jewish uncles I had been visiting before the conference. They were the only survivors my mother still had to call family. All the others had been lost in concentration camps. I was so deeply aware suddenly how this affected and changed the lives of my mother and her two Jewish brothers. They had been left very much alone in the world at a very young age by the time that war had ended. All this and more came from within my body into my thinking self. It felt as though water was now inside me not outside of me. The river I was sharing with Erna had moved into me and the temperature from warm was now changed. It had turned to ice. It hurt.

It was the next day at the workshop called Practicing Focusing Within and Between Cultures that I felt something in my chest. The word “ice” resonated and seemed to

symbolize this new sharp pain in my chest. The workshop was structured as a “round-robin” so each person was able to share their focusing experience on a cross-cultural felt sense while another group member actively listened. Sharing at the workshop with another person reflecting it all back for me was astounding. It gave a kind of reality to what seemed to be a dream experience. The workshop was giving us some common words and meanings to allow us to resonate together what was happening for us. I tried to give it my fullest attention as the workshop unfolded, and slowly it began to melt into soothing water as I listened to a participant from Holland do some sharing about the night before. It all happened slowly but with meaning. The waters were not only soothing but began to have a nourishing quality. Along with the melting and nourishing, something important had also happened. Something had crystallized and it had some huge meaning, not yet known but a big aha moment was about to unfold in my life. The crystallizing sense had me go back to some life changing memories in a new way.

So leaving behind all my extended family, waving goodbye to everyone I knew in the world, while my mother cried and cried, now had a language to hold it all for me!! “Stopped Process” Doralee was saying and I felt a newness settling into me. A warmth was sinking into me and growing with that phrase...so it had been a real traumatic experience for the little girl I thought...so many years later. What happens when the implying cannot carry forward? Had my body been carrying an ongoing process of implying? These were new words with new meanings but I was captured by the presentation in spite of a confusing language, yet meaning seemed to be lurking right underneath it all. Was I now this week experiencing “Leafing”? Was something new and fresh wanting to be implied? The carrying forward continues to want to be allowed. Leafing suggests that expansion can happen! Something grew warmer inside me. I was both inside something and at the same time outside of it! The hurt left over from the night before was gone. The new way my body was carrying all of this was very big and seemed to have great value.

So words we know when brought into awareness in new situations could have new meaning. “Symbolization” was now moving all that forward. I achieved a sense of conflict solution. There was no either or situation for me now. I could be both Canadian and still claim my roots from Holland. In fact my body truly wanted me to reclaim those roots. The two parts of me seemed to be folding one in to the other as I made the connections. Now I understand that this ‘crossing’ of meanings brought forth a new meaning that expanded my experience of the meaning of my life so far.....I am not really either culture.....I was something richly “more” that connected me between and within cultures and allowed me to dissolve into a new knowing of who I am.

My focusing since has shown me that the trauma of that day has informed and directed who I am now in so many ways and how I behave in the choices I make. I had no real idea how important this reclaiming process was to be for me. It has begun and I love how it feels. I have clarity for example about my resistance to change, my curiosity and need for family, roots, history and the missing pieces, the stories. I am beginning to understand my parents better. I see why my obsession to return to Holland from the day I left in 1951 until I did return in 1964 has led me to a kind of addiction to travel and deep desire to experience other people from other cultures and in their own environment. My sense of loss seems somehow

related to my need for adventure. I seem to be insanely curious about how others live out their experience of being who they are in their own culture. Much of this has shown up as the teacher of children from so many different cultures all thrown together in the city where I live, such as the 48 countries represented in my last school. I admire others who seem to have a clear sense of belonging and knowledge of the generations who came before them. I know I hunger for it.

There are still many more questions than I have answers, but those waters in me are now flowing not frozen. They are nurturing, not stopped. There is an excitement or sense of adventure in all of this. I am neither Canadian nor Dutch. I am both and I am “more.” Just lately what came was a sense of being dissolved into the planet and a true sense of oneness with the universe! Such blessings!!

JOSINE’S WARTIME CHILDHOOD

Josine van Noord

Dear (traumatized) people,

After writing about this on the Focusing Discussion list, I was invited to write it as an article for the Folio.

Before World War II there was an economic depression in the Netherlands. My father, who was studying to be an engineer at the Technical University, decided to go to Indonesia since it was still a Dutch colony. He spoke Dutch, Indonesian and English so he had no trouble finding a job with the Singer Sewing Company, an American firm.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, an American Base on Hawaii in 1941, all the men in our neighborhood including my father and my mother’s brother were deported to Thailand and Burma to work on the Death Railway. It is a 258 mile railway between Bangkok, Thailand and Rangoon Burma (now Myanmar), built by the Japanese army during World War II to support its forces in the Burma campaign. Forced labor was used in its construction.

About 200,000 Asian laborers and 60,000 Allied Prisoners of War (POWs) worked on the railway through the jungle. The living and working conditions were horrific. About 25 % of the POW workers died because of overwork, malnutrition and diseases like cholera, malaria and dysentery.

I was practically born in a Japanese prison camp in Indonesia. The women, including myself (1 year old), and my mother were deported to prison camp on Sumatra, where we lived at the time. First we lived near the cities then in the middle of the jungle on a deserted

rubber plantation. Many babies died; I think I survived because my mother breast-fed me until I was almost 2 years old. We all had dysentery from the first till the last day of the camp, 3 1/2 years later. The women were also forced to work hard for the Japanese; they had to cut trees or make cotton mattresses with little needles, and they were beaten if they lost a needle. My mother was beaten with a gun by a Korean soldier, because he was ordered to do so by a Japanese officer. My father and my mother's brother stayed in prison camp working for the Japanese on the Death Railway in Burma. We all had many terrible diseases and almost died from hunger.

After the war we were transported from one end of Sumatra to the other, and many Indonesians tried to kill us because they had a freedom war going on. We were protected by Ghurkhas (soldiers from India with white turbans on their heads). It was all very confusing. We ended up in Bangkok where I had the first relaxed year of my life, at 5 years old. Of course we had lost everything from our house with everything in it, including family pictures.

In the bad period after the war we had to go back to Holland without a place to stay of our own. I slept in a room with people I didn't know and my mother, who had started working, slept in a cupboard for 2 years. We didn't even have our own clothes. As soon as we could hire 2 rooms, people that survived would come and visit us, we always ate together and I used to listen to how the traumatized grown-ups would tell each other horrible stories, often in a comic way. Half of my class in basic school in the Netherlands was from Indonesia, but nobody ever paid attention to that, in fact it was best not to talk about it. That was a terrible experience, but since it affected so many people we thought it was normal. The elder generation used to make jokes about the war, but they wouldn't tell us children what had been going on. I survived, but everybody who had lived in Indonesia hated the Japanese, and did not buy Japanese things, etc.

Long ago I heard some Japanese men talking to each other in a restaurant, and all of a sudden I felt so uncomfortable that I had to leave the restaurant.

But I survived with ups and downs. The finishing touch was regression therapy with Marta Stapert that took me back to prison camp. She encouraged me to also start Focusing. But I was still very uncomfortable when I had my first serious encounter with a Japanese lady in a workshop led by Ann Weiser Cornell. After avoiding her for 2 days, I saw how nice she was and felt ashamed. So I invited her home and she came, but I didn't want to tell her about my past so as not to embarrass her. Then I went to the International in Ireland and was put in a home group with two Japanese ladies. They were younger than I, and I liked them very much, but felt so stressed about my past that I decided to shut up.

In the second meeting of my home group, I still didn't want to talk about it. But the feeling that this was somehow unfair to them became so strong during the session, that when we were about to stand up because it was finished, I stood up and said, "There is something I have to tell you". And I told them about the whole situation and ended up crying because they were so sweet. Then they stood up, put their arms around me and we cried together. I cried about the craziness of the world and all the wars going on, now and in the past. Afterwards I felt so happy, like I was floating.

After lunch one of the Japanese ladies came to me and asked me if I would focus with her. I felt very honored that she chose me. While Focusing with me, something very sad for her came up. I stuck to the process, but somehow it felt that she was releasing me, and I did the same for her. The wonderful experience of sharing this awareness, and the feeling that nothing really matters except being kind to people who want to be kind to you, has been with me up to now. It did cost me an old friend who is still traumatized about prison camp and doesn't want to let go of it. She treated me as if I couldn't help being so ignorant, instead of understanding the hard work it took.

At the Focusing International Conference in Costa Rica in 2004, I had a short Focusing session with a Japanese man and during the session I opened one eye and saw his face quite close to me, and I thought of my poor old mother who passed away and wished she could have seen me. I feel grateful to the Japanese Focusers because through their attitude, they made it possible for me to get rid of a burdensome past, a trauma that has been with me for a long time, and a trauma that took a lot of energy.

Through focusing I learned that there is no Truth. Everybody has his/her own truth, I learned that 'the Truth' is not important. What you do with your own truth is important, also for the Japanese people. The bomb on Hiroshima that saved our lives because we were dying, destroyed the lives of the grandparents of the young Japanese that I met.

It took me awhile to realize how very kind and polite the Japanese were that I met through Focusing. I discovered they had a 'tough sort of kindness', that I recognized once I let go of my old ideas. I have pictures of myself at the last conference in Holland with 2 young Japanese psychologists. I see in these pictures what I feel: confidence. Confidence that it is OK, that it doesn't matter where the good-willed people come from. What matters is that they are there, right in front of you.

FROM FEAR TO FREEDOM How Creative Alternatives Theatre Can Help Overcome Self-stigmatization

Jacqueline Wislesky, M.A., F.O.T.T.

There is a widespread mindset that people with psychiatric illness do not have the capacity for self-determination. One unfortunate outcome is self-stigmatization, in which people with psychiatric illness avoid self-advocating activities or enrolling in emancipatory learning opportunities to avoid the pain of even lower self-esteem (Imel, 1999). Instead, they accept their vulnerable position and unwittingly perpetuate the oppressive mindset by relating from that place of fear, thereby halting their own rehabilitation (Landon & Seeman, 2000).

In the words of one woman in her mid-twenties with bipolar disorder who I interviewed about the fear associated with self-stigmatization:

There is a fear of other people finding out and there is the deeper fear, of people knowing but not understanding; of people knowing and rejecting you for this. Instead of the lens becoming clearer, it becomes cracked and broken. Every facet of your personality is suddenly interpreted as an aspect of your illness. “My, don’t you look manic today.”

Services to help someone like this woman may include physician visits, medications and one-on-one or group therapy — or hospitalization when she is “crashing to the ground.”

Given the number of people affected by mental, neurological or behavioural problems — the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates 450 million people worldwide — it is important to find ways to shift the seemingly inevitable outcome of self-stigmatization. And with the cost of mental illness in 1993 in Canada estimated at least to be \$7 billion (Health Canada, 2006), there is not just an ethical but economic value in better intervention models to provide empowerment, supportive relationships, social change and learning (Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin and Lord, 1998; WHO, 2003).

Some of the solution may come through peer-led programs like Creative Alternatives Theatre (CAT) that may be part of an emerging mindset and practice in mental health called psychosocial rehabilitation.

This article discusses findings from a recent study I conducted that sought emerging theory and program improvement about CAT. I collected the impressions of seven participants, aged 28 to 67, who participated in the program from two to six months in a drop-in centre for people with long term or persistent psychiatric illness (Wislesky, 2006). In total, the program ran for almost two years under my leadership/training.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES THEATRE

To understand the role of CAT, it is important to see where it fits in the theoretical picture. Overall, the guiding principle for the program is that conditions promoting a spiral down can, when inverted, promote a spiral up.

A key principle of psychosocial rehabilitation (PSR) is to develop novel programs, guided by the client, that enhance goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behaviours — or self-advocated self-determination (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward & Wehmeyer, 1998). It is a shift away from the institutional or medical model of mental health care that seeks to measure recovery to an ambiguous standard of health, and instead is a practice that WHO says is “the most important advancement in services for people with serious mental disorders (2005, paragraph 5).

The term “self-advocate” may summon up the picture of an aggressive, unreasonable person. Actually, a self-advocate is just someone who has overcome the fear of stigmatizing attitudes enough to communicate his or her own interests, desires and rights. It also involves making informed decisions, and shifting the responsibility for those decisions from the therapist or institution to her — or himself (Wehmeyer, 2002; WHO, 2003).

To self-advocate, however, one must have a favourable self-concept (Atkinson, Zibin, & Chaung, 1997; Silverstone & Salsali, 2003). When people know their own interests and can risk making mistakes without losing self-esteem, they can determine for themselves what actions to take by mentally “maximiz[ing] outcomes because they know what they can and cannot do” (Franken, as cited in Huitt, 2004, para.6).

Humanistic theorists say that self-concept is a socially constructed phenomenon (Purkey, 1988; Gendlin, 1997) and develops through a “process of taking action and then reflecting on what we have done and what others tell us about what we have done” (Huitt, 2004, para. 8).

Conversely, studies show that lower self-esteem, regardless of the definition, lowers one’s ability to self-determine a high quality of life (Atkinson, et al., 1997). This in turn deflates a person’s self-concept (Huitt, 2004; Purkey, 1998) indicating that there is a repetitive downward cycle between low self-esteem and psychiatric disorders (Silverstone & Salsali, 2003). On the flip side, it has been shown that populations initiate positive social change when they believe their hopes and dreams can be realized (Landeem & Seeman, 2000; Nelson et al., 1998; Russinova, 1999).

Integrated with the social environment of the CAT program is *Focusing*. Linda Olsen, Ph.D believes, “healing involves the *Focusing* process directly” (Olsen, 1999, p.2). She maintains that the spontaneity experienced during the *Focusing* process leads to the “human organism balancing itself, physically, emotionally, and mentally” (p.2). *Focusing* has also been shown to enhance personal growth with people who live with psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia (Hendricks, 2001). It was found that even a slight development of *Focusing* capacity was helpful when other models and techniques, other than medications, made little effect. Hendricks states, “this repeated finding deserves attention [because] helping such a person distinguish between emotions and felt senses and providing an interaction that

attends to the person's body sense of situations helps experiencing become ordinary and manageable" (2001, Discussion of the Findings section, para. 6).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I collected both qualitative and quantitative data for an action research study (Glesne, 1999; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Palys, 2003) of the Creative Alternatives Theatre program through surveys, observational field notes and informal focus groups.

The approach was within the "Interpretivist paradigm" (Glesne, 1998; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Palys, 2003; Stringer, 1999). "Interpretivists believe that what people know and believe to be true about the world is constructed — or made up — as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 48). This was also a value of the CAT program itself.

My role was to "get into the phenomenological world of the other, that is, deeply know people who are different from oneself" (Palys, 2003, p. 214) by participating as actor, story teller and witness in the program.

THE CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES THEATRE PROGRAM

The CAT program was developed over seven years in a variety of contexts as a therapeutic community development tool. It has been successfully implemented with youth in prison to seek alternatives to violence, with elementary and secondary students as curriculum enhancement, as organizational development for team building and more.

Program development was informed by learning opportunities such as acting, directing and producing with community theatre, certification as a Focusing Oriented Therapist and Trainer, course work in adult learning and leadership through my Master's program and other life experiences. I am currently developing a facilitator's manual with the same title of this article that will be useful for team leaders, parents, community leaders, and mental health professionals.

What is unique about CAT, among theatre-based therapeutic and community development programs, is that *Focusing* is integrated throughout the model to draw out implicit experiencing as the basis for enactments and as a debriefing tool.

Following are some participant responses to the program that I have shaped into a poetic transcription:

My Life Can Be

Belonging, I feel good, Similar feelings, Accepted.
Regardless how you see yourself,
I am treated well and respected.

Speaking up with confidence. Synchronization.
Working out suppressed emotion.
It extends. Practice Extroversion.

Meetings took place in a section within a modern and comfortably decorated common room. This was our stage. Each meeting began when I emptied my bag of eight large coloured scarves into the centre of the area, which avoided announcing the start in an authoritative 'teacherly' style.

With members sitting on high back leather office chairs in a circle, I asked them to sense into their bodies to notice what colour scarf might represent how they were at the moment. This invited participants into the *Focusing* process of identifying their implicit knowledge through their body sense. Each participant then could say why they chose that colour.

Each person spoke without inquiry into the sharing, though we all listened and appreciated each one, demonstrating the positive community feedback needed to build a favourable self-concept. One participant commented that this is an opportunity to "realise that we all are not alone and that we can connect with each other in a different way than normal. Most of the time we talk about other stuff and I don't get to know people on that deeper level." (Fieldnotes, February, 2006). Other comments were, it "engages colour with feeling and inner messages" (Survey #014), and it is an "opportunity to express inner self" (Survey #016) and "good introduction to feeling better" (Survey #012).

One participant said, "I've got so much going on with my family right now and it was like a tornado inside and made my stomach all tight."

"Is that uncomfortable for you?" I asked.

"Yes, but it's okay because I think I know what to do. I just need to separate from the tornado. I just need to let them swirl around and I can stay separate."

"That sounds like something new for you."

"It is. I've always gotten so caught up in it all and tried to fix it and it just sucks me right in but I see that I don't need to do that." The participant was smiling.

I responded with, "Wow. That sounds wonderful" and others joined in giving responses that were similarly congratulatory. I asked this participant if we might use this as a theatre enactment.

In this case, two people enacted the scene by creating a tornado-like sculpture using coloured scarves that went on for only a few moments. This was followed by one other person entering the stage area who divided up the pieces of the "tornado." Following this

enactment there was a lively discussion about staying separate from other people's "tornados" and separating our own pieces within our own "tornados."

The enactments also allowed participants to reflect on the difficult paradoxes within their lives with ease. For example, one participant told the story of their satisfaction being in the theatre program but that they are frustrated with their illness and wish they did not have to come. To express this story, we used a style that Jonathan Fox (1994), the developer of Playback Theatre, calls 'pairs.' One person stood in front of another and took a pose suggesting a warm feeling with a peaceful looking smile. The actor in the back leaned out while holding their head yelling, "I wish I wasn't this way anymore" (Fieldnotes, February, 2006). The acknowledgement that this story was a universal one with participants was demonstrated through enthusiastic applause.

STUDY CONCLUSIONS: "KNOW THYSELF"

The study showed that the CAT program helped create a community that enhances "psychosocial competencies, which are, essentially, abilities that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life" (Lemma, Alberto & Cavallo, 2000, p. 19) and may be an integral part of the continuum of community-based mental health care. Through an integration of Focusing and theatre, the CAT program helped participants build their ability for self-determination by supporting the development of a favourable self-concept.

By symbolically representing implicit experiences within a community context, in dramatic forms, participants shifted from a poor self-concept to a more favourable one. Comments included "[I] hear personal stories from others and get to reinterpret them" (Survey #014) and "it's so much better to have an audience" (Fieldnotes, February, 2006) indicating that having witnesses to provide feedback is helpful for reconstructing self-concept. One participant stated, "I think that the theatre program helps one focus on the daily happenings both good and bad. It has helped me resolve a negative event in my life and helps me to view it in perspective" (Survey #013). Another suggested that enactments help "overcome obstacles in life since it takes guts to do them" (Fieldnotes, February, 2006) while another stated that "making decisions [during the enactments] builds confidence" (Fieldnotes, February, 2006).

This finding corroborates Gendlin's work that suggests a person may shift their self-concept by noticing the symbols they give to their thoughts, feelings and events (1997). He says, "Experiencing itself changes in the act of symbolizing it" (Gendlin, 1997, p. 267). Hendricks adds, "helping such a person [living with psychiatric illness] distinguish between emotions and felt senses and providing an interaction that attends to the person's body sense of situations helps experiencing become ordinary and manageable" (2001, Research Studies section). This suggests that Focusing can help participants shift their self-concept from helplessness over their psychiatric illness to mastery within the context of their situation.

Secondly, participants developed a favourable self-concept as they reflected on the community feedback they received (Huitt, 2004; Purkey, 1988) and as they communicated their implicit knowing by observing, reflecting and taking action in the development of CAT

enactments, followed by positive feedback from others (Purkey, 1988; Gendlin, 1997; Huitt, 2004). As one participant said, “When you find your idea is accepted and can go as far as you can and get support, you realise people care — it boosts your self esteem” (Fieldnotes, February, 2006).

The following poetic transcription made of participants’ responses suggests they were developing supportive relationships, as well as compassion within themselves:

Warm Relationships

Bring me closer. People trust in me
Make good friends.
I found out that I’m free.

This is supported by Boehm and Boehm (2003), who studied participation in community theatre in which participants shared personal experiences. They found that “an increase in personal empowerment is manifested in the following aspects: self-esteem; mastery; critical awareness; expression of one’s inner voice; propensity to act” (p. 294). As one study participant said, the CAT program provides an opportunity to “discover, confront, and express suppressed emotions and rationalizations” (Fieldnotes, February, 2006).

In this environment, where art represents life and the outcome is not predictable, participants were celebrated when they took risks for practicing to identify, express and act within the safety of a rehearsal space. This means that the program becomes a rehearsal for living. A poetic transcription from the participants’ own words reveals this finding further:

A Place to Communicate Freely,

Age Twenty-Eight, Sixty-Seven. Get out of my Comfort Zone,
I’m bored.
Laugh. Stretch. Laugh. Have fun.
No, I’ve never done this before.

Expressing creative feelings,
in a free environment with others.
To get praise. Create.
And to do some more.

Overall, participants demonstrated that the old adage, “Know Thyself” is the key to enhancing self-determination and overcoming the fear associated with self-stigmatization. This is vital information for PSR program developers as they seek learning opportunities that will expand participant’s understanding of who they are and what they like to do.

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NEW PATTERNS OF RELATING
TO COLLECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

ASSERTIVENESS AND SOLIDARITY IN A LANDSCAPE OF FEAR

Rob Foxcroft

I have been struggling for some days with a question:

“Is there any way to balance the ethical life against the natural life?”¹

What I am asking (what I would like you to be asking with me) is this:

“If by ‘ethics’ we mean some version of the view, that ‘the needs of each person ought to weigh equally in the scale, against the needs of every other person’; then how can I live an ethical life without being utterly crushed by the intolerable demand which duty makes of me?”

Please pause here...asking this question of yourself...and about your own life...sensing into its meaning...allowing some sense of perplexity to arise, about the issue as a whole...

Is it ok to buy myself a Mozart CD, given that the same money would feed a starving family? Is it ok to buy new shoes, in the knowledge that they may have been made by child labour? Is it ok to take an hour for myself, when I could be writing to a prisoner of conscience? Is it ok to relax in the safety and comfort of my family life, walling out my awareness that many people are gazing uneasily over a landscape of fear?

These, I think, are real questions. To answer them in one way seems to lead to a life which would be unendurably burdened, which even a saint might fail to sustain. To answer them in the other way seems callous and provincial. Given the density of suffering in the world, it would seem almost unforgivable, if I were to say:

“I know there are refugee camps just over that hill. I believe that the governments all around are using these people as a pawn in fierce and terrifying power games. Clearly, my own government is implicated in the camps being there. But I’m going for a nice holiday. I’m going to see my friends, eat lovely food, swim in the lake. Oh, they’re starving, you say? They live in fear, in the immediate presence of hunger and squalor, the imminent threat of death? Ah well, that’s sad. But really, what can I do? I don’t see why I should get involved”.

Is that how we are thinking? If so, how do we manage it? How do we manage (if we do) to wall out the pain and fear of others, sufficiently to get on with our lives? And ought we do that? And if so, to what extent? Or are these perhaps the wrong questions? Is the

dilemma radically skewed in some way? — The issues which arise here are extremely tangled. I don't expect to say anything new, or even very clear — for this territory is a graveyard of hopes. I am just wanting to tease out some preliminary features of the dilemma in which our natural ethical awakening places us.

In the first part of this tentative sketch, therefore, I must show that people do sometimes experience a sudden or gradual ethical awakening. I will ask what that is like; and give some idea of what it is, about this awakening, which is problematical.

Afterwards, I shall try to show why (in a certain sense) the natural must be privileged over the ethical; and that this need not be disastrous (or even very ugly), as one might at first expect. I shall say something rather general about “natural emergent human values”; and something very specific about the creative process in human beings — about the nature of thought^{2,3}. I shall end by connecting all this to the idea of “*living in a landscape of fear*”. I will suggest that there is reason for hope, and a profound truth in the ancient saying, that “*Perfect love casts out fear*” — indeed, that even hesitant and very imperfect love has a power to build bridges and to heal wounds, to bring peace inside and outside ourselves.

(1) MANY PEOPLE DO EXPERIENCE A SUDDEN OR GRADUAL ETHICAL AWAKENING.

Human beings are extremely various, show marked personality even in infancy, and follow highly idiosyncratic paths of development. But I think it is broadly true that when we are little, we are in some ways wrapped up in ourselves — in our own world, our own needs, our wants and dreams and longings. Even so, it is clear that infants do feel the pain or distress or anxiety of others, and are troubled by it. So (to my mind) the story which we have sometimes been told — that children are all self-centredness, and have to be trained to become social beings — that story is plainly nonsense.

I should prefer to say, that there is a way in which young children *ought* to be self-absorbed, that something is maybe not quite right, not quite secure, not quite happy, in a young child who is too sensitive to the needs of others — that the roots of fearfulness are probably growing in that child; also, that we need to get out of the way, as young children begin to assert their feelings and needs, pushing themselves forward in independent (and often inconvenient) action. It is also clear that young children form very strong attachments, that they love deeply and abidingly; and finally, that children have a natural and passionate sense of fairness.

With respect to my title terms — it is partly these natural capacities (to feel with another person, to come alongside them, to be an equal, to be loyal, and to care passionately that your friends are treated fairly) which I gather together under the crucial portmanteau term: *solidarity*.

There seem to be grounds already for revising our first idea of a sharp conflict between the natural and the ethical life. There is something in our nature, which makes it likely that we will come to respond, to the fear and suffering of others, more and more as if it were our

own; and there is an innate sense of justice, which may come to approximate more and more to an impartial ideal. In that case, it seems that our natural desires may tend to converge, little by little, with the logic of impartiality. We feel for others, as well as grasping the austere logic of duty. Natural feeling and ethical conviction are running alongside one another now, rather than coming head to head. And this completes the concept, for which I am using the term: *solidarity*. I want this term to embrace not only our natural empathy, but also the logic of impartiality — when I use this term, I intend it to mean a mature fusion of these two aspects.

There is also something else in us: a deep inner necessity, which obliges us to *assert* ourselves, to be stubborn or thrawn, to proclaim our independence and the autonomy of our will and judgment. Without that *assertive* streak in us, what use would there be to anybody in our having a merely passive sense of *solidarity*? So here is my second title term: *assertiveness*. I hope to show decisively and unmistakably that *without assertiveness, the ethical life is in ruins*.

Thus the central argument I am making is this: that the drastic opposition between the natural and the ethical views of life tends partly to dissolve, once we are re-construing the whole territory in terms of *solidarity* and *assertiveness*. It may dissolve, however, at the cost of being more open to the pain and the outrage of compassion.

It seems natural to imagine that a small child may feel an overwhelming sense of weakness and inferiority, relative to the big people who are all around. Finding that “*I am weak and little*”, the child perhaps adopts one or other of the following metascripts for living: either, fearfully, “*Help me! Come here! If I go on being helpless, maybe I can get you to go on taking care of me*”; or, obstinately, “*I’ll show you! One day, I’ll be as big and strong as you guys. Go away! I can do it all of myself*”. Once a child has adopted one of these scripts, the script of anxiety or the script of freedom, it seems that the script tends to stick. It is not so easy, maybe, to shift from a passive to an active style of being in the world; or from an over-independent to a co-operative style of living⁴.

Thus children are from the start social beings. Personality unfolds within a social context, a social experience. There is a natural social development, which emerges from inside the growing child. This development can only be carried forward in interaction with the world of other people. There is a blueprint, if you like; and the blueprint expects the world (the social world, the human community) to be of such a kind, that what it foreshadows can become actual⁵.

As we are growing up, most of us get in a tangle. We lose contact with the subtlety and resourcefulness of our natural imagination. We are trapped by rules and prejudices, which can hardly be called “our own”, since they seem to have become glued onto the surface, or blotted over us, rather than to have emerged through a natural process of situational learning. When adults around us mistrust our natural development, are fearful and untrusting towards the future adults whom we shall one day become, we may well become confused, hesitant and anxious. We are all tangled up in rules and stuff. We lose contact with both our natural *assertiveness*, and our natural empathy. Our natural ethical sensitivity is twisted, blocked or painted over. Yet our true nature is not so much absent, as obscured⁶.

And I think that in some people, these powers creep back into view quietly, little by little, as different situations call forth different responses. A child is entranced by a hamster, sad when it dies. A young man discovers a certain competence in himself, which wins respect in the world. A girl falls in love. A baby is born. A grandparent is taken ill. There is famine overseas. For many people, compassion and social interest seep in; to use another image, they radiate slowly outwards, in ever-increasing circles.

In other lives, there is some shock. Some dramatic event takes place, which breaks through the shell, the accumulation of callous habituation. A boy goes to be a soldier, all gung-ho, his body full of dreams of being a real man, having a gun, fighting and being tough, and coming back a hero and a real hard man; but what he sees makes him say,

*“My dreams, my dreams, are all shattered in a ghastly reality.
Earth and sky are not for those in prison”.⁷*

For he comes home broken, in a way, gravely fractured and shaken, caught behind the bars of his horror, his frozen terror, his human outrage. At the same time, it may sometimes happen (I do not imagine that it always happens!) that he has been forced up against a possible view of life that is less schematic, more ambiguous, and more compassionate. Having passed through the fire, he may never again be able to forget others: the plight of the widow and the orphan, the poor and the oppressed, is always with him — and so his life may become radically oriented towards compassion, towards the hope of social change.

(2) WHAT ETHICAL AWAKENING IS LIKE.

Many centuries ago, it may be somewhere in the Fertile Crescent, in the country now variously called Palestine or Israel, somebody had an idea which has inspired countless people ever since, in every part of the world. Perhaps it was a windy, dusty morning. He was tramping down the steep road from Jerusalem to Jericho, heading down the tricky curves, keeping a wary eye out for bandits behind the rocks. Perhaps there was a person lying by the roadside, who had just been knifed and robbed. He wondered, *“Am I next?”* Or maybe not. Perhaps the men of the tribe were away, when an enemy came into her camp, who was in the last weakness of thirst and starvation. She was frightened, very frightened, for her body and her honour.

But at any rate, there comes a moment in your life when you forget to ask fearfully — *“If I stop to help this person, what will happen to me?”* Instead, you are taken aback, as you hear yourself asking — *“If I do not help this person, what will become of them?”*⁸

Maybe the person in trouble is out of sight or far away? It makes no difference. The idea that came to our prophet is this:

*Wherever there is fear or suffering, it is the concern of us all.
Whoever you are, and wherever you are,
your trouble is my business.*

(3) WHAT IT IS ABOUT THIS AWAKENING, WHICH IS PROBLEMATICAL.

The world is rank with suffering — with poverty and exile; injustice, cruelty, tyranny and oppression; ignorance, misunderstanding and prejudice; resentment, hatred and conflict; with simple vulnerability, whether through youth, frailty or old age. We are truly living in a landscape of fear — fear of drought and famine, fear of change, fear of shame and dishonour, fear of self, fear of one's own community, fear of strangers, fear of the violent, fear of the rich, and fear of the powerful. If we were to let all that in, opening ourselves to the full desperation of many people's lives, would we go mad?

To make our lives bearable, we shut out even our own fear and suffering. To make our lives comfortable, we try to forget the pain of others. In dread, lest we be utterly engulfed, we close the doors of our empathy. We divide the world into insiders and outsiders. We harden our hearts against the outsider. We harden our hearts against our own feelings, becoming brittle, critical, and defensive.

But human beings are naturally empathic. We cannot be wholly happy, whilst *anybody* is in pain. To frame our social experience in terms of “insiders” and “outsiders”, we must make compartments. But will compartments not always leak, sooner or later?

For two hundred years, we have been exposed to a callous and optimistic ideology of freedom, which declares that if everybody looks after their own separate interests, we will end up with the best of possible worlds⁹. Still, as we contemplate the ubiquity of fear, the prevalence of war and conflict, the desperate state of the common environment, the countless ways in which we are all in the same precarious boat — is it not possible that each person's happiness may only be achievable, when we face our terror of one another, and learn to pull together? Is it not time to seek a new synthesis, a new ideology?

(4) WHY THE NATURAL MUST BE PRIVILEGED OVER THE ETHICAL.

So there we are. We are faced with the absolute necessity of following along with human nature, the certain ill-effects of trying to override it. We know that, right from the beginning, bad things happen, when we try to force a child to “*Think of others*”. Yet it hardly seems prescient, simply to say, “*Every man for himself*”. And we have already seen that, even if we wished to say that, we just can't do it. Like it or not, our compartments will leak. Thus, *we can't bear solidarity, and we can't avoid it.*

That is our dilemma. But we have already seen some of the way forward.

(5) PRIVILEGING THE NATURAL OVER THE ETHICAL NEED NOT BE DISASTROUS.

*“Start where you are.
Use what you have.
Do what you can.”*¹⁰

Many years ago, Gene Gendlin wrote that “*Ethics has been replaced by psychology*”.¹¹ He was speaking prematurely. Philosophers (not all, but many) went through a phase at that time of radical scepticism about the whole project of ethics. Now, having learned from the sceptics, we can agree that “*Ethics must come to terms with psychology*”. Any system of ethics is doomed to failure, if it ignores human nature. People may well bracket their own feelings and needs, in order to follow some moral code — but we would now say emphatically that they *should not do that*.

There is no choice, but to “*Start where you are*”. Where we are is in the middle of our natural lives — our jobs, friends, interests, loyalties, our immediate hopes and fears. It is only from here that we can adopt the maxim, “*Use what you have*”. What do we have? In addition to that natural life-world, in which each of us is situated, what do we have, which we can bring to the ethical life?

Fundamentally, there are two things:

1. our sense of *solidarity*
2. our natural *assertiveness*.

Within these we must specify:

3. our natural power of empathy
4. our natural sense of fairness
5. the network of our passionate loyalties and attachments
6. our developed sense of the predicament of others.

Finally, there are two things I haven't talked about yet:

7. the power to think objectively
8. our awareness of human limitation.

About (7). There is our power to look behind appearances, and to see underlying structures. Commonly there is no hope of change, until we grasp the pattern, the causal network. It is vital for us to think clearly: to balance “the view from here” against “the view from nowhere”. We *must* be — and we steadfastly refuse to be *only* — where we are, in the middle of a local and narrow view. We are here — and also, we must struggle to achieve a wider, more objective, more impartial view.¹²

“*Here I am, still travelling, trying to broaden my mind, for I've seen too much of the damage narrow-mindedness can make of things, and when I return home, I will devote what energies I have to repairing the damage.*”¹³

We keep looking for ways in which our judgments may be biased. We have to be strongly “fallibilistic”: that is, “we take it for granted that few or none of our statements are immune to correction” — but we need not concede very much (if anything) to relativism or philosophical pragmatism, nor give up the project of objectivity.

Finally (8), (and a little ruefully) we have our awareness that we can't do everything. The wise policy is to “*Do what you can*”. I continually hear myself saying to my students,

“*Nobody is expecting you to do what you can’t*”. In that spirit of modesty we set out, from inside the pattern of our natural lives, to reach out to others. In particular, we want to be sure that, when we think we are helping, we are not simply feeding our own needs and vanities;¹⁴ and when we think we have reached our limits, that we are not merely callous and half-committed. So we try to clarify our intentions.

We are not answerable for all the complexities of the world, by which our work may miscarry or fall into ruin. We are answerable for making an effort to know ourselves. Our responsibility is not for outcomes; it is to do the best we can in the circumstances as a whole. And perhaps you feel helpless? Act anyway. Join with others. *Do what you can*. It is never right, to abandon hope.

(6) NATURAL EMERGENT HUMAN VALUES.

It has been found over and over again, for example in contemplative practices, in psychotherapy, in Nonviolent Communication, and in Focusing partnerships, that as people come to know themselves and their own fears, and come into contact with the needs and feelings of others, certain common values tend to emerge.

I will mention four of these:

1. We learn that it is destructive to despair, or to lead others to live in fear of failure or of being shamed (but see value 3). We come to practise a strategic optimism.¹⁵

We have known sinking into the valley of the shadow, the cold dampness of the underworld. There are places here from which no Eurydice can escape, unless Orpheus should come with his lute and fire in his heart, burning a path to freedom. Even then, there can be no looking back.

2. We learn to approach all living beings in a spirit of tenderness — to be open to life; to be responsive to the carrying forward of living processes.¹⁶

We have tried imposing *oughts* and *shoulds*, and frankly, the results have been pretty ruinous. Something else happens, when we ask, “*Where is the life here?*” — waiting quietly for some living creature to move or call.

3. We learn that justice matters. It is not enough to be kind. To be fair to everybody seems such an easy thing at first; until we are brought up against hard cases, concerning which it is tempting to be shallow and evasive.

Wherever there is secrecy, falls the shadow of torture and abuse. Nothing has more effect, in terms of human rights, than for people to become aware that their deeds will be

known, that people are remembered for their actions. In this case (see value 1), it can be both constructive and necessary for people to live in fear of being shamed!¹⁷

4. Finally, we learn to be aware of context, to treat every situation as a unique pattern. We slowly learn not to treat people as examples of general types (“*She’s a Jew*” — “*He’s a Muslim*”), but as living, breathing human beings, each one of whom has an intricacy of experiencing, which needs to be heard, and can only carry forward in its own unique way.

Susan Stebbing comments, “*What I am most concerned to do is to call attention to the complexity of the ethical situation. Whether he likes it or not, Nero is within the wider situation. The question which confronts him is whether in this definite situation it is better to stop fiddling and put out the fire.*”¹⁸

(7) FULLY EMBODIED THINKING — THE CREATIVE PROCESS IN HUMAN BEINGS.

So what is this unique carrying forward (values 2 & 4, above), which is so crucial to our awareness of context?

Focusing, or “fully embodied thinking” (as I prefer to call it), is about the emerging of new patterns from the creative unknown. This process has of course been known for countless centuries.¹⁹ It has been claimed, however, that there used to be no social forms, which would hold a space for Focusing to go on in.²⁰ I am myself uncertain, whether this claim is plausible — but I am quite sure that in the present social context the need for Focusing is peculiarly urgent.

Why? Well, during transitional periods in human culture, beliefs and values may for the time being be extremely volatile. Think of Late Antiquity,²¹ or China in the period of the One Hundred Schools.²² Today, we are living through one of these transitions. Few if any of us dwell in communities, in which traditional beliefs and values can be simply taken as read. For this reason, it is both possible and necessary today to live in new ways. In order to live in new ways, we need to be in touch with the essentially embodied nature of human thinking. At this time, there is no good way to get by without fully embodied thinking.

From observation of a great many people during moments of transition from “surface thinking” into fully embodied thinking, Gene Gendlin and his friends and colleagues have generated various sets of *Focusing teaching-steps*. Using these steps, we can revive this natural process in people, in whom it has become blocked by fear, trauma or ideology.²³

Here is a very simple version of the teaching-steps,²⁴ which I am using just now:

1. a blockage in the soul

You have a problem in your life. The forward movement is stopped.

You are feeling some sort of blockage in your soul.

2. a little pool of silence

You stop what you are doing. You let your thoughts and feelings settle down. You need to be calm enough to feel very low-level emotional states. Soon you are aware of a clear space within you, some degree of stillness or openness.

You have come into a little pool of silence.

3. making each guest welcome

You sense for a feeling of the problem, noticing what it feels like *as a whole*, noticing the quality of *the whole thing*. This feeling may well be extremely subtle, even elusive. There may be many feelings, images, sensations. Each has a story to tell, and will tell that story, once it feels ready.

Each is like a guest, whom you make welcome.

4. the likeness of the guest

You set out to look for a word, phrase, image, sound or gesture, which captures the quality of the felt perplexity. You refine that saying, until something in your body eases a little. You begin to be able to say what the feeling is like.

You begin to have a sense of who the guest is, of what she is like.

5. the gift, which the guest has brought you

You are inviting the stuck pattern to loosen, to free up in some way as yet unknown. You are sensing for some carrying forward, waiting for a creative step to bubble up, accompanied by some kind of felt movement. You are waiting for an opening — and will know it when it comes: for with it comes surprise, release or relief — a sigh or laughter, heart-easing or tears.

Your guest tells her story, and offers you some gift which she has brought you.

6. giving thanks for the gift

You welcome such a life-step, when it comes. You are taking time to allow the new to be integrated, so that the system does not fall back into the old stuckness, when you say “Goodbye” to the loosened, open space.

You are thanking each guest for the gift which she has brought.

(8) LIVING IN A LANDSCAPE OF FEAR.

So here we are, in a world more and more saturated in feelings of fear and hostility, of hatred and suspicion, of prejudice and isolation, of violence and impulsivity.

Can fully embodied thinking, which seems so simple, be a vehicle of transformation? Will it enable us to explore our fears and tangles, so that new creative life-steps come, and life flows forward once more? Inside ourselves, can this process mediate the claims of the natural and the ethical life? And in the wider world, can this process bridge the chasms of fear and mutual incomprehension, which (together with gross inequalities of power) are making our world such a dangerous place?

I judge from my own experiences and observations, that the answer to all of these questions is a resounding “Yes!”

Yes, certainly. Let us think of focusing-and-listening as a single process of human encounter. This single process, then, is the royal road to a synthesis of *assertiveness* and *solidarity*, which tends to resolve that abrupt conflict between the demands of the natural and the ethical life, the qualities of which I have been trying to evoke in these pages.

And for these reasons:

1. that to be gently and quietly attentive to the meanings held in our bodies is the deepest way in which we show love and compassion *for ourselves*; and also
2. that *when we listen to others* with empathy and sympathetic kindness; when they are able to sense into their meanings, their experiencing, their fears and suspicions, their feelings and needs; then not only may their own lives be carried forward (which is already a precious gift) — and the lives of those around them...but also these people, by the contagiousness of our listening, may experience the capacity of sincere and sensitive listening to cast out fear and terror; to dissolve prejudice and loathing; to replace separation and isolation with a sense of *solidarity* and common humanity; they will tend to let go of the vicious tendency to see a person as a mere example of some rigid category; as we are listening to them, they may well experience a renewal of the natural urge to *assertive* and independent action, a lively sense of themselves as agents in the world; they may arrive, sooner or later, at that phase of ethical awakening, of which we have spoken; they may find at last, that the denuded *landscape of fear* has “suffered a sea-change”, that they are now living in a numinous world, *a landscape of compassion*...and above all, they may experience the capacity of human encounter to embody love in all its fullness.

I began by calling this territory “a graveyard of hopes”. Yet it seems there is hope. Though these thoughts are merely preliminary, they suggest that a synthesis of the natural and the ethical may be found. *Assertiveness* and *solidarity* are interdependent.

We can walk an ethical path, feeling neither burdened nor callous, but luminous and joyful. Our path takes us into the heart of the landscape of fear, and our walking tends to transform it.

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- 1 This very sharply utilitarian opposition owes a great deal to Jeremy Bentham, of course, but takes its form here largely from the discussion in Thomas Nagel, *"The view from nowhere"*, chapter 10. Nagel writes of a trio: "living right/living well/living rationally" — in place of my two pairs: "assertiveness/solidarity" and "natural/ethical". As you read on, you may like to be aware that these contrasts all owe a debt, not so much to the writings as to the life-story of John Stuart Mill (see J S Mill, *"Autobiography"*).
- 2 The phrase and the concept of *"natural emergent human values"* is from Carl Rogers — see Carl Rogers and Barry Stevens, *"Person to person"*. Carl Rogers has in several places set out his evidence.
- 3 John Dewey describes this process in his book, *"How we think"*. E T Gendlin (universally and affectionately known simply as "Gene") calls it "Focusing". A worldwide Focusing movement has grown up, in whose development he has played a central role, though a great many colleagues and co-researchers have also contributed. It is possibly arguable that Gene Gendlin's role has been over-central, and may have led to a dwindling of that healthy dissent, without which no movement remains alive and creative.
- 4 Alfred Adler — a basic theme, treated in many writings.
- 5 This image, though not unique to Gene Gendlin, is one of which he has made frequent and persuasive use.
- 6 The writing of Carl Rogers on "conditions of worth" is relevant here. See *"On becoming a person"* (etc).
- 7 Michael Tippett — oratorio, *"A child of our time"*.
- 8 Martin Luther King tells the story of the Good Samaritan in rather this way, in his posthumously assembled *"Autobiography"*
- 9 This is the core of the argument in Adam Smith's book — *"The wealth of nations"* — and is widely regarded today as the residual (or only now possible) ideology.
- 10 Arthur Ashe — tennis player.
- 11 Gene Gendlin is the author of many books and articles. Here I am referring in particular to — *"Experiencing and the creation of meaning"* (1962) — chapter 7.
- 12 For "the view from here" and "the view from nowhere", see Thomas Nagel — *"The last word"* and *"The view from nowhere"*.
- 13 Malcolm X — in Arabia, at the end of his life.
- 14 But see Martin Luther King — sermon, *"The drum major instinct"*.
[<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/sermons/680204.000_Drum_Major_Instinct.html>]
- 15 The phrase is adopted by Hilary Putnam, in describing the attitude of John Dewey — see his *"Ethics without ontology"*. The theme is one which Gene Gendlin often takes up, insisting that *"Pessimism is an insult to life"*.
- 16 Gene Gendlin — *"A Process Model,"* chapter 8.
- 17 The work of Amnesty International, and the publications of Human Rights Watch, provide abundant evidence of this.
- 18 Susan Stebbing — *"Ideals and illusions"* (1943), p 86ff, abridged.
- 19 For recent examples of immense interest, see (1) Virginia Woolf — *"A room of one's own"*, p6 and elsewhere; (2) Gottlob Frege — *"Nachgelassene Schriften"*, 1914/1969, pages 225-226, abridged; translated in Michael Beaney, *"The Frege Reader"*, p315; and (3) John Dewey, *"How we think"* (1933), pages 12-13, a book which has had immeasurable influence on the development of Focusing (see Gene Gendlin, *"Experiencing and the creation of meaning"* (1962) — pages 60n, and elsewhere).

- 20 Gene Gendlin — “*Focusing*” (1978), and in other writings and talks.
- 21 See Peter Brown — “The world of Late Antiquity” (1971).
- 22 See Angus Graham — “*Disputers of the tao*” (Open Court, 1995).
- 23 The crucial role played in the development of Focusing, and of the Focusing movement, by the Chicago group, Changes International (and by Kristin Glaser in particular), has not yet been adequately described in any published text.
- 24 The image of the guest has been introduced to Focusing by Pat Omidian and Nina Joy Lawrence. It is taken from Jallaladdin Rumi — Sufi poem, “*The guest-house*”, from the “*Mathnawi*”.

ILLUSION...REALITY? Making Sense of Non-Sense Through Focusing

Bala Jaison, Ph.D.

This is not your usual abstract outlining exactly what will be covered in the article below. Yes, this piece will certainly address how Focusing can make a definite difference in a “landscape of fear”. It is also about the general confusion, illusion — maybe even delusion — that can happen when fear is allowed to seep into the mind, creating a disconnect between outer reality and inner truth. I believe that Focusing can provide a sane counterbalance to fear, so that the *felt*-sense does not become *non*-sense.

A WORLD OUT OF FOCUS...

It all started for me after 9/11. I am probably not alone in saying that I have yet to actually fully recover from that event, and not because it was so-called “close to home” (i.e. in North America rather than somewhere “over there”). It is because after extensive reading (post that dreadful day), I could not believe how incredibly naïve I had been in the first place. There had been hundreds of terrorist attacks and threats in the past: a U.S. Embassy bombing in Beirut in '83; the Pan Am Flight 103 that exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland in '88; the Air France hijacking in '94 — and of course the earlier attempt on the World Trade Center in '93 (to name a few).

The only difference (for me) between those horrors and 9/11 was that I never really ‘took them in’ or let them ‘touch’ me. So the first shocking realization was that I did *take it in* this time (and every ghastly event thereafter) in what felt like constant and relentless blows to the Soul. Hence, I have been struggling ever since with how to live in the world in a way that is realistic: being proactive, productive, spiritually aware, and avoiding succumbing to what feels like a massive depression — no, not personal depression, but a kind of global grief for the pain, poverty, destruction and injustice in the world that nearly brings me to my knees with agony, if I let it too far in.

No place feels safe. How odd that feels to write. I know a lot about safe *inner* space: how to make it, how to live in it at a personal and interpersonal level, but as soon as I switch my awareness from personal consciousness to global mass-consciousness, nothing that I know interiorly “fits” anymore. I have only recently come to understand *why* that is so. At an intrapsychic level, I can trust what is true or real or “right inside”. I *know* what I know. I can viscerally *sense what is so*, and knowing Focusing has supported and validated the process of trusting that inner knowing.

The problem was that the concept of inner *felt knowing* did not seem to fit into current global patterns in any way that made sense. Why? Because I realized that I no longer had any accurate feelings to serve as an anchor-point that I could reliably trust regarding *what* was true. I no longer believed that anyone — politicians, the media, our Governments — was

telling the whole truth. In fact, the complexity of today's world seems to render the concept of "the whole truth, nothing but the truth..." as either simplistic or a total oxymoron. To use Focusing terminology to describe the present human dilemma, we might say: Everyone is right (for themselves) and nothing is right (for everyone). There does not seem to be a way to "make room" for all of it, i.e. the diversity of human inter-cultural perspective, in a way that the world *body* "buys". The current world "spin" seems to dictate that we need to operate on the general principle — unlike Focusing — that someone must be 'right' or 'wrong'. Our dearly held notion of *both/and* (rather than *either/or*) has not yet been utilized by humanity as a concrete way to move forward. So much for the depressing part.

COMING INTO FOCUSING...

On a more uplifting note, having reflected long and hard about and since 9/11, I have also come to the realization that there *are ways* that people can operate more effectively in groups, in society, and in interpersonal cultural interactions. Focusing is one of them. Before I go further, I would like to clarify something, so that any non-Focusers who may be reading this do not construe (or misconstrue) Focusing as a cult or some new fangled fad.

One of the aspects of Focusing that has made a lasting impression on me, and has deepened my commitment to getting it out into the world, is that Focusing is not an 'it'. It is not a religion, or some kind of club; there are no requirements or prerequisites for doing Focusing — except a *wanting* to.

For those who don't know Focusing, it is a gentle yet powerful process that helps us to connect and 'dialogue' with our own inner places of 'knowing'. The uniqueness of the process is that it can integrate with anything and everything, from the most profound experiences of contacting deeply held feelings, to the most mundane: "*Should I put the flower pot here or there...umm...what's my sense about that...*" The process begins with what we call the "Focusing Attitude". This refers to a way of being, both with oneself and with others, that includes creating an environment of safety, in order to speak freely with non-judgment and non-blame, whether Focusing on our own or with another. The essence of being able to Focus is in learning how to *listen inside*, making permission and (inner) space for whatever parts of the self wish to speak. The results are a new internal flow that allows unknown issues or places of discomfort to emerge openly and without constraint. In Focusing we say that we "sit with" and "listen to" with concentrated attention and empathy to *whatever is there*, so that what was initially unclear and vague — *implicit*, becomes clear and more manageable — *explicit*.

Part of what helps the Focusing process move forward is the presence of a listener. There are many distinctive features to listening in a Focusing oriented way, one of which is called "Experiential Listening". This form of listening embraces more than simply reflecting back what the speaker has said. Listening to a Focuser *experientially* entails 'taking in' (to one's own body) what the speaker/Focuser has said, and getting an empathic 'feel' for it in order to reflect back not only the speaker's words, but also the speaker's *felt meaning*.

This combining of the gentleness of the Focusing process with the power of presence often results in a profound "shift". These "shifts" that come through Focusing can be poten-

tially transformative — not so much because the issue actually changes, but rather because *our relationship to the issue changes*. And this is what interests me: *How* can Focusing and the attitude of Focusing a) make a contribution in alleviating some of the tensions facing our world today, and b) how dialoguing with a “Focusing Attitude” can support and enable the many disparate groups in our society — groups with vastly different experiences — to relate to each other in new and meaningful ways that will produce positive change in what is currently a very dysfunctional world.

Focusing has a crucial role to play as a viable, effective model for bridging differences and building connections. One of the great strengths of the Focusing process is the ease with which it can be readily, flexibly, and creatively integrated with and in any number of situations and/or practices. The general tenets of the process, which include being kind, respectful and non-judgmental to one’s self and others; listening with felt-attention and empathy to others, as well as to one’s self; maintaining an attitude that allows room and space — *both/and* — for diversity at all levels, helps to create a climate that is conducive to interacting with others in ways that are both authentic (to one’s self) and tolerant (of others). It seems that the people who are already actively living by and using the underlying values and principles of Focusing — either implicitly, explicitly or both — have made, and are continuing to make, some meaningful inroads into the world of conscious transformation.

THE WORLD OF FOCUSING...

And so, I have a story to tell — a story that demonstrates in more practical and concrete terms how the Focusing process, with its unique way of listening and embracing ‘attitude’ of safety, supported a group of people in coming to terms with some difficult and painful issues. This story is twelve years old, yet it is as alive and clear in my felt-memory right now, as it was when it first happened.

This story is profound, touching, scary at times, and uplifting in a way that is a tribute and living testament to how Focusing *can* bring “new patterns of relating in a landscape of fear”. Further, how, if groups: political groups, cultural groups, school groups, business groups — any group! — used this process regularly, global transformation would indeed be *moving forward in a right way...*

(For those of you who were there, this story will be familiar, as it is one of the many that was openly shared at the time it occurred, and many times after, both verbally and in print. I hope these reminiscences touch your heart. For those reading it for the first time, well...I hope these reminiscences touch your heart, as well.)

It was the Spring of 1994, and the first Focusing International Conference that was held abroad — in Germany to be exact. Our hosts had been to every International in Chicago — five of them. Hence, when they suggested that the Europeans be given a respite from the expense and time of having to travel to the U.S. for this event, no one could quarrel with that logic — and so, it came to pass, that the conference would be held in Europe.

It turned out that many people had ‘feelings’ about going to Germany. It also turned out that until we got there, people guarded those feelings with hushed caution. At the time I

thought I was alone in what I was experiencing. I now know (after the fact) that what weighed heavy in my heart beforehand was shared by many, regardless of their country of origin or religious proclivities...and so I would like to share a bit of my pre-conference process:

I am a Jew, and at that particular juncture in my life (it has all totally transformed now) just the word “Germany” brought definite uncomfortable felt-senses into my body. I felt guilty about feeling this way, especially since I not only had many German friends (our hosts among them), but also a German brother-in-law whom I dearly love, and further, the most important teachers in my early spiritual life were German, as well. So it was not about *being* German — it was about *going* to Germany.

I carried the angst about this all by myself. I was terrified to mention my feelings to anyone for fear of sounding...I cannot even find the words here...let’s just say for fear of being judged very badly. I was, as the saying goes, “a nervous wreck” from the moment I signed up for the conference until I arrived. So this was my state of mind as I headed toward Germany.

In the opening session we were warmly greeted, and it felt comforting to be amongst colleagues and friends whom I had known for years. We introduced ourselves in the large opening circle, saying our names and the countries from which we came. Then, seemingly out-of-the blue, our hosts asked us to “check inside” and quietly ask ourselves if we had any “feelings about being in Germany”. I nearly fell off my chair. My stomach was turning over in a way that bordered on nausea. I felt that I had to keep silent, lest I reveal my innermost secret: I wanted to be at the International. I did not want to be in Germany. Yes, I had A LOT of feelings about being there.

The room went silent for what seemed like an interminable period of time. I was sure I was going to faint...then...one lone hand went up, and one lone person had the courage to say, “Yes, I have a lot of feelings about being in Germany.” She shared, as a Jewish woman, her concerns, fears, and discomfort about being there. When she finished, there was a very long pause — dead silence — then another hand slowly went up. This time it was a non-Jew, a European whose country had been badly affected by the Nazi regime. More silence, then another hand, then another. What started as inner terror began to morph quite miraculously into astonishment, then into total awe, as the circle of sharing went on and on, creating a sense of connectedness, as deeply held fears, concerns, regrets, remorse began to reveal themselves. Everything I had been feeling was being expressed now...so very openly in a Focusing way...with people listening from the depth of their souls...*and this was just the opening session...*I thought to myself...

Our hosts had been, I silently reflected, so unbelievably perceptive. I could hardly fathom what they were inviting, where this would go, what would be the outcome. I was moved to the core by their courage to keep inviting *more...* And so, the next day, we were encouraged to take a longer-than-usual period of time for Focusing triads in order to come to terms with whatever...*all about being in Germany...*brought up for us.

I have no recollection whatsoever of how I wound up in my particular triad. I was with a male colleague that I knew from Chicago and a German woman I had never met. As we often do in triads, we took some quiet time to see who felt moved to begin first. The German

woman wished to start, and indicated that she would like me to be her listener. This was fine. I was relaxed, and adjusted my energies into a clear listening space, not ever imagining what was about to come next...

She looked at me before closing her eyes and simply stated, “My father was a Nazi.” (All I remember of that initial frozen moment was thanking G-d that she closed her eyes *before* seeing my jaw drop.) She did not know my cultural/religious heritage, and was now moving deeply into her own inner process. Slowly, she began talking about her past...she talked about her father, a member of the Gestapo, pulling the switches on the gas chambers. She described the pride that her mother took in what her husband was doing, working for the total extermination of the Jews. She talked with the most profound pain I had ever heard — ever — about *knowing inside* that this was wrong, and not being free to express her most deeply held feelings in her home. She talked about a point in time when her father had a change of heart about the rightness of what he was doing, but not able in his official position to have “a change of heart” — so he committed suicide, instead. She talked about the pain of running away from home permanently in her mid-late teens, because she could not bear her mother’s continued commitment to the Nazi philosophy and hero-worship of her dead husband. She talked about how it felt to never make contact with her mother again, after she left. The story seemed endless...each memory brought yet another memory...the complexity of her pain was unbearable for her...

And for me...well, this was before the days of *Interactive Focusing*, so there was no format, no structure in place at that time to express *how this was for me*. It was *her process* — my job was to listen. Part of me felt pulled by a sense of responsibility and doing what I had agreed to do: to be the “listener” or “Focusing partner”. That meant being reliable, present, and fully *there*. My “job” was to reflect accurately and empathically. *And/also*...something else was going on in another part of me. I was simultaneously listening to the sound of my own voice echoing the words I was reflecting back...as if they were coming from someone else’s body: “So there is a terrible, painful feeling in you, right now...a sense of such horror and deep agony that you carry... knowing at such a young age that your father’s job was to exterminate...(gulp)...and feeling so sickened knowing that your own mother was so proud of him (gag)...and those feelings have weighed so heavily on your heart...for such a very long time...” *Was I really saying this?* I was feeling as if I might go completely mad, as I noticed this other part of me “freaking out” (the term I used to myself then) — now I would call it “vicarious traumatization”.

How could I listen to this? Could I bear it? Could I keep on keeping on like this? I had to make a choice. I made a choice. I remained the listener. I kept everything that was “my stuff” separate, and listened with every fiber of my being — I had to — I felt that if I lost concentration for even a second, I might break down on the spot. It was not until the end of the process, when she opened her red and weeping eyes, that I realized that the three of us, in total connection, were crying from a place of such primal pain that there are still no words to describe it, all these years later.

This woman had been severely traumatized. Through the process of Focusing, and being listened to with caring and safe attention, she was able to, for the first time in her

whole life, tell her story in its entirety. Her embarrassment went beyond what she could verbally articulate. She was embarrassed by the story. She was embarrassed to be who she was. She was saddled with guilt and remorse about where she had come from — her early roots. She was horrified at what her father had done. Her pain was as palpable to her as my pounding heart was to me. My empathy level far exceeded anything I had ever known. It was Focusing that allowed me to listen to the ‘unlistenable’. It was through knowing and living Focusing that I was able to keep a safe space for my self and my pain, freeing her to process in a way that touched into the deepest core of what she had been carrying for a lifetime. I felt so very grateful that during the conference we were able to share further Focusing time to process (together and then in a larger group) what we had each experienced in that powerful triad.

What I did not know (coming out of our triad) was that the other small groups also had their share of heart-rending stories — so many in fact, that it was collectively decided that there would be another open (optional) Focusing process in the evening for anyone who wanted to come.

There were, as I recall, over twenty people there. We stood (I have no idea why) for much of the process — a very long time. We stood in a circle so we could see each other, and the stories poured out — so many stories, with more crying, more pain — and all of it processed in a *Focusing* way, with the deepest level of caring, safety, listening, and *felt-knowing*...a profound understanding that stretched all boundaries beyond anything I had ever experienced before.

The signal moment — and major turning point in my life forever — was when our German colleagues in this group (all born after the war) began to share what it was like to *be* German; what it was like to carry the burden and guilt of being German for a whole previous generation; what it felt like to be dismissed by total strangers for simply saying, “I’m German”. NEVER in my entire life had I considered the implications of this predicament from a non-Jewish perspective. I was totally astounded by the endless stories of rejection in a myriad of circumstances — all different, all the same: dismissal, embarrassment, pain — both personal and professional. These people were my friends — and I never knew. I had never thought about it. “*How had I missed this?*”, I asked myself. “*Because it never came up — that’s why.*” This was not something that any of us had ever talked about — ever. But we were talking about it in that circle. We were talking about it now. We were living it now. We were grieving it now...and now together, we were experiencing the transformational power of a *collective felt-shift*...

A WORLD WITH FOCUSING...

The larger picture is the miracle of healing, and how, under the safe and sheltering umbrella of Focusing, this *living process* transformed a group of scared, uncomfortable people into a cohesive, functioning whole. We had cried rain — a downpour — a tsunami of tears that ultimately washed away the barriers between “us and them” into a very definite

“we”. A profound group tension was transformed into a profound group bond. I think we sang *We Are The World* — certainly I was singing it in my head. Focusing made it possible.

It seems to me as if, inherent in Focusing, is the world of possibility, and within *possibility* is the hopefulness of change, making almost anything (in terms of human misunderstanding) more workable and more manageable. The ‘attitude’ of Focusing creates a sense of safety in which people can express their innermost feelings and thoughts openly and freely. In turn, being ‘listened to’ in a Focusing way allows us to contact the deepest places of self in a more authentic manner — building connections and a sense of relatedness with others, thus making dialogue on *any* issue possible ...one felt-shift at a time...

Thanks to the foresight of our hosts, we were able to talk about our concerns and our process openly. We continued talking and writing about it after the conference. Twelve years later, we are still talking about it, and the process is as relevant now as it was then — perhaps even more so today.

And so, I cannot help wondering...

What would it be like if all the disparate cultural/religious/political groups knew Focusing...? How, knowing Focusing, would these diverse groups of people be with each other differently...than how they are being with each other now? How would empathic felt-sense listening and the attitude of Focusing make a difference to the concerns and fears that impact upon our society — our world?

And finally, how will *we* carry our work forward...? How shall we continue to plant the seeds of what *is* possible...to help move us closer to the collective understanding that truly, *we are the world*...

A COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH TO FOCUSING: The Islam and Focusing Project of Afghanistan*

Pat Omidian, Ph.D. and Nina Joy Lawrence

Afghanistan is a country traumatized by war, drought, population movements on massive scales and a normalization of violence. This is a country that has seen almost 30 years of war and, with a population that averages less than 18 years of age, most Afghans remember nothing else but war. This is the context of the Islam Focusing Project of Afghanistan, in which the authors have been involved for over 5 years. Afghanistan is not the only long-term conflict in the world, and what we learn here may become a model for other countries.

The approach we take in Afghanistan is one of empowerment and community/family sharing. It is not one of “professionalism.” This is based in a public health model that uses preventive models and primary health care methods, rather than clinical or tertiary care modalities. By simplifying Focusing training, incorporating basic psychosocial wellness and resiliency, basing all of this in local culturally recognized language and symbols, we are able to share it widely. In this way we hope to promote psychosocial wellness (individual and community healing). In this paper we describe our approach to Focusing as a basic community psychology and public health activity.

INTRODUCTION

No one knows how many people in Afghanistan are depressed, but we do know that very large numbers suffer from stress-related illnesses and many from somatic complaints¹. Clinics are filled with people wanting relief from headaches, backaches, problems sleeping, and general body pain, etc. Most cannot afford the many medicines and injections they receive to try to alleviate these pains. When numbers seeking help are too great to be addressed from a clinical approach, one needs to try another direction. The authors decided to turn the problem on its head and see what would happen using a local, community-centered approach that would recognize and incorporate Afghan tradition and strategies for achieving resiliency.

In order to understand what we do, it is important to discuss the assumptions upon which our work is based. First, we assume communities have answers to their own problems. This means that we believe psychosocial wellness can be found within the culture in which we work, in the same way that solutions to emotional issues or problems are found within oneself through Focusing. Second, we assume that individuals and communities can get in touch with those values and beliefs that promote wellness and community and put those positive values and beliefs into action for healing and wellness. One of the ways we found to achieve this healing and wellness is through Focusing. Next, we feel that Focusing, a human process, can be found in every culture, in some form. By promoting local ways of explain-

ing Focusing, we can successfully help people of any community benefit from this healing process. Finally, we assume, and are told by our Afghan colleagues, that Focusing is an important component in working on trauma recovery and healing.

Reflections on how Focusing Helped the Authors Work in Afghanistan

Nina Joy Lawrence and Patricia Omidian came at this from two very different directions, but the paths converged and led to new understandings and amazing possibilities.

OMIDIAN'S VOICE

In the fall of 2000, I was asked by an Afghan aid agency (CHA) to help their staff deal with the difficulties of working in Afghanistan while living as refugees in Peshawar Pakistan. I knew, from long experience with working on community mental health issues for Afghan, Arab, and Iranian refugees, that whatever kind of program I developed, talk therapy would not be successful. I asked Nina Joy Lawrence to help me and she introduced us all to Focusing.

As I learned Focusing, I also had to listen to my inner self, and my concern for the people of Afghanistan. This agency was involved in working in drought stricken areas of Afghanistan, and in areas controlled by the Taliban. The agency's budget was directed toward saving people from starvation, providing basic health services and health education. How and where would I fit into this agency? And how could I, a well-fed Westerner, take money for my salary if it meant someone in Afghanistan would not eat. And as I learned Focusing, one of my big conflicts was the feeling that I would be developing a program to help people feel better about starving. How can anyone do that?

In our model here, we speak of these parts or conflicts as "guests". I had several big guests that I needed to be in presence with, but these guests were very strong. As I remember that struggle I recall how it felt like something in me was betraying people, rather than helping them. This brought a sense of shame and a need to hide. It was very difficult to stay with either of the guests; the one judged — and said I was making people comfortable so they can starve — and the other felt ashamed that I would do this. Sitting with the part that felt shame was difficult as a new Focuser, and at that time I was often alone with no listener to help me. We did not have trained Focusers yet, so companioning had to wait for trips back to Islamabad and Nina, or I could struggle to listen to myself. I learned to do a lot of Focusing on my own in that time.

As the parts were listened to, and it happened slowly over that year, I became more open to working on Focusing and on psychosocial programming in general, for at risk populations in war zones and with refugees. Now I see Focusing and psychosocial programs as a critical part of any recovery and response process — as important as bread and water to surviving and recovering populations.

LAWRENCE'S VOICE

“How did you ever start teaching Focusing in Afghanistan?”

Whenever it comes, this question brings an odd, jiggle sense of not fitting with my experience. It is usually accompanied with, “I could never do that. You are so brave! It must be terribly difficult.”

Maybe looking at it from the outside, what I do looks brave and like a big lunge into the unknown, but it didn't happen that way.

I was a counselor, accompanying my geologist husband on a Fulbright Fellowship to do research and teaching in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1997. We met and shared a house with another Fulbright scholar, anthropologist Dr. Patricia Omidian. We became family that year. When we came back again in 2000, Patricia was still there, now working for an Afghan aid organization. She needed something therapeutic for aid workers under great stress and she asked me what might work.

I used Focusing to sense into what might help Afghan refugees. I made an open place inside myself for what might come forward out of the whole of my psychology, counseling, meditation, and Focusing background. Focusing came as a possible way forward, and a hugely creative process began as we learned how to teach it in an Afghan way. We continued to use Focusing to sense how to teach in that context, trying things out, sensing how they worked, getting feedback from the Afghans, getting their ideas. A crucial piece was a creative insight that came in me, of the similarity between Focusing and some Sufi poetry, written by Moslem mystics 700 — 1000 years ago. This pointed to a similar human process, and showed that something like Focusing was already being done in this area of the world, that it wasn't new, imported, or Western. Building on Sufi practice and Pat's anthropological and community mental health background, we found a way to share Focusing widely, using community health practices rather than a clinical model.

The Afghan aid workers loved Focusing and invited me to come to Kabul after they were able to move back home in November 2001. I wasn't feeling clear about going for a long time after I'd been invited. There was still too much hardship and danger for me, to feel right about going. I'd heard about lack of food, water, shelter, and the difficult life people were having. And I lived with the invitation not knowing if I would go, or when. Then I began to hear from Pat and Afghan friends that life and travel there was less difficult. That's when I began to sense inside for a feeling of rightness, safety, and fitting...about going to Afghanistan. Each time I have gone I sense my way into the trip. I wait until I get enough feeling of clear rightness to take a first step, and then I set a tentative span of time for my trip. I also pay attention to where my life energy seems to be directed, and whether it feels possible to go away for a time. Still holding the trip lightly, I begin gathering information about security, getting a visa and ticket...or if I find I am not working towards going, I take time to listen to why I am not doing that. I keep holding the trip lightly, having a provisional intention, which eventually firms up into forward action, and finally I can tell I really will be on my way, Inshallah. Then I am flying out over the ocean for another amazing time of sharing and receiving with wonderful Afghan people.

In my experience this big project that seems such a monumental task hasn't happened by leaps into the unknown, but has come about by starting where we are, sensing our way forward, doing what was right in front of us in little steps.

The Afghanistan Context

Mental health and psychosocial wellness programming in Afghanistan are important components of the reconstruction and reconciliation process. In all studies of women in Afghanistan, high rates of depression and PTSD are found (Miller et al 2006; ***). With trauma and depression rates this high, clinical approaches are inadequate to meet the immediate needs of society. Violence has been normalized and is often seen as the only available solution to conflicts. An MSF (1999) study noted:

[A]ll families have relatives that have been killed, are missing, or have been taken prisoner. And all men have been involved in the conflict, either as soldiers or when defending their households from strangers. This means that they have either witnessed or been directly involved in acts of severe violence. MSF found that many men were blocking memories of these events and focus on current everyday tasks to get by. Some men talked about the time of war as a good time and show signs of being addicted to violence (MSF 1999:20-21).

Clinical information shows dramatic increases in stress related illnesses, such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and gastro-intestinal disorders. Drug addiction among various Afghan populations is on the rise (UNODC 2005). Most children have been displaced at least once because of war, lost family because of war, and suffered mentally and physically because of war (UNICEF 2001; SCF/US 1998).

Definitions

The Psychosocial approaches we use are public health: community level efforts that reflect a preventive, broad based methodology for dealing with trauma in a non-clinical way. We find in Afghanistan that most people are unaware of basic psychology and the effects of prolonged stress on their bodies. Our approach combines Focusing with basic psychosocial information that facilitates wellness of the community and the individual.

“Psychosocial”, is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the influence of social factors on an individual’s mind or behavior.” Wellness (also called well-being) is defined by OED as a “state of being or doing well in life.” Psychosocial wellness then refers to an “ability, independence and freedom to act and the possession of the requisite goods and services to be content.”

- Psycho—having to do with emotions and personality
- Social—relating to rules and relations within a society or community (or family).

Psychosocial programs address the dynamic relationship between psychological and social effects, each continually influencing the other. In the aftermath of war and with violent solutions seen as the only choice for conflict resolution, psychosocial programs are particularly important in countries like Afghanistan, as they struggle to rebuild communities.

Resiliency is another important part of what we bring attention to in our work and the in Focusing programs here. When one is resilient, one has the ability to deal positively with problems and traumas in life. By being resilient, one is able to master problems and difficulties, even disasters, in a way that supports mental wellness, and maintains social and emotional connections. In our programs we invite participants to list what they feel keeps them resilient.

The list usually includes

- A goal in life, something to work for or to live for
- Resourcefulness and creativity
- Ability to help others
- Showing kindness to others
- Remembering good things and good times
- Full range of emotions, positive and negative

And particularly for Afghanistan, we find *belief* in the Divine and hope for the future to be their most important points of resiliency (Miller et al 2006).

And in all our programs we use Focusing. Ann Weiser-Cornell describes Focusing as:

“... a process of bringing attention to your body in a gently, accepting way and becoming aware of the subtle level of knowing called the ‘felt sense.’ When you pay attention to this body knowing with interested curiosity, this leads to insight, physical release and positive life change.” (Weiser Cornell 1999)

“Body knowing” and “felt sense” are ways of talking about inner reactions to external events and emotions. With Focusing one can learn and understand what one is actually feeling or wanting. Afghans have a close relationship to the bodily felt sense, although many try to avoid it out of fear. Even their language evokes images of the felt sense. Deep sadness is called *jigar khun* which literally translates to “the liver bleeds.” Depression is *fishar paeen*, low pressure. Anger with frustration is called *asabi* and is often identified by pointing to the blood vessels in the head and to the feeling of the heart working hard (Omidian and Miller 2006).

Because Afghans seem to have a head start on Focusing, we describe it to Afghans as being a simple way of paying attention to the insides of ourselves, the place of wisdom, and the places that hurt. It is not new; it is not from the west; it is a *human process* that has roots

in many very old cultures. The Sufis of Islam identified this process over 1000 years ago. It took Gendlin to articulate this model for Western audiences, but Afghans find it very comforting and familiar.

Islam and Focusing:

Focusing mirrors many of the actions of Sufism—the branch of esoteric and mystical Islam practiced at the periphery of Islamic traditions. Many Sufi schools have their roots in Afghanistan, and one of the most well known of the Sufi poets, Jalaludin Rumi, came from the Balkh area of Afghanistan (Nicholson 2000). Supporting Focusing as a mental health tool are two main tenets of Sufism: The first is that, according to the Quran, God is closer to each person than each is to his or her own jugular vein:

It was We who created man, and We know, what suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein (Sura 50: Aya, 16).

This means that one does not need to look far for support from God when one is in trouble or feeling emotional pain. This leads to the second concept of Sufi tradition: that God is found in each of us. Externally, one sees only the signs of his work, but to speak to God, one must look inward. Approaching the divine in Sufism is approaching “Presence.” The Sufis understand the inner world as being larger than the outer world that we see because it is within ourselves that we can find Allah (Eaton 2001).

In developing the program, it was found that Afghan culture offers its own way of approaching problems in this inner world: by treating each problem as a guest. One does not usually want to face painful emotions; in the same way, one does not want to invite unwanted guests into one’s home. However, in Afghan culture, guests are considered “gifts from Allah.” When Afghans are asked what they would do if someone comes to the door, maybe an unwanted relative, whom they do not like or want to see, they admit that they would, of course, invite the person into their home and serve them tea, food and conversation — as if the person were a welcomed guest. So too, it must be with the inner guests in one’s life. As Rumi echoes in his poem, *The Guest House*:

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,

still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

(Translated by Coleman Barks)

The poem illustrates the philosophy of accepting all emotions, even painful ones — a philosophy that reassures the Focuser that all humans face the good and the bad. While Afghans now share a common history of death, destruction, flight and loss, many talk about intrusive thoughts and emotional reactions, often trying very hard to avoid places where they might have to remember something they would sooner forget. Knowing that they can face these fears and emotions, and that others also share these same fears, helps with coping. Thus, the program is designed to support local resiliency models while introducing some deeper ways to address the painful memories and emotions from the war and the struggles of daily life.

Our program integrates the spiritual and the social with Focusing in groups of 25 women or men. One woman in a program in Parwan province learned basic Focusing and some resiliency. She was struggling because her teenaged son was recently killed by another youth in the village. She was in emotional pain, and wanted a revenge killing of the youth who had killed her son. This is a traditional pattern in her society and community. And it is her right to ask for the death of the other boy at the hands of the men in her family. She Focused one day in the women's group. Inside she found she had a guest that was so sad and weeping about her son's death. But then she saw her son standing on a hill next to the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). She realized at that her son was closer to Allah than she is — and that he is in a better place. She could no longer ask for revenge against the boy who killed her son. She came out of the Focusing session feeling relieved and calmed.

Simple Focusing:

At the center of simplifying Focusing so it can be spread widely through community avenues are two simple teachings:

1. Guests come and go inside us, as well as in our homes.
2. We can listen to our inner guests in a way that helps us heal naturally.

We help people recognize inner guests and show them how they can be with their guests to learn from them, and let them heal when they are ready.

One important aspect of Focusing is learning how to listen to and accept any inner experience, including the painful and unwanted, from a place where judgment is suspended or even absent. In our classes we spend a great deal of time practicing listening as a central component of the psychosocial work. Listening skills, active and without judgment, are key to the process. When one learns to listen well to oneself, listening to others becomes easier. And learning to listen without an agenda or a goal offers the inner experiences a place to be heard in safety. Then, by being heard and not judged, these “guests” can begin to change on their own without the Focuser having to make the changes happen. In fact, when we translate Ann Weiser Cornell’s concept of “radical acceptance of everything” into the local languages we say:

- Without judgment
- Without taking sides
- Without having goals

When one listens with that level of acceptance and kindness, things change.

In our workshops and programs we always assign homework, so that participants can take home and practice what they learn. One of the first assignments is to listen to someone in the family for 10 minutes, doing only listening with no advice or feedback, and not telling them it is a homework assignment. After listening in this way, we talk to them about how they felt to be heard in this way. The responses we get are often funny, like the woman who listened to her son tell a joke without laughing. But often it brings changes in relationships. One man told the group how this assignment changed his whole relationship with his son. He said his son has a mental problem (not treated or diagnosed) so everyday after work the man would see his son and lecture him on what the 15 year old boy did wrong or right for the day. In this assignment he listened instead to what his son had to say. And he was amazed. His son had a lot to tell, which needed to be heard. The man thanked us for what we offered, the simple skill of listening from the center.

Program Planning:

Our program is simple. We now have more than ten people trained as Certified Focusing Professionals to help in the expansion of the program. And we have a large number of people, we have no idea now how many, who are trained as Community Focusing Trainers (CFT). The CFT has a basic training in psychosocial wellness, Focusing, and in what is called Training of Trainers (ToT). ToT trains people to conduct participatory learning seminars on any topic. Ours is on Focusing and psychosocial wellness. The ToT is incorporated into the psychosocial and Focusing training modules that are conducted by the authors or by AFSC training staff. Two partner agencies to AFSC now have Certified Focusing Professionals who can give the same course.

Once the CFT has completed the psychosocial training and Level 1 of the Focusing training, with the ToT, they are ready to set up groups in their own community. The groups

are usually same gender groups because of local cultural restrictions. In the rural areas we are very careful not to offend local culture, and make sure that men are leading men's groups while women are leading the women's groups. In one area, a local mullah (religious leader of the community) liked the work so much that the men in that community meet in their local mosque. In Afghanistan this is almost unheard of, but it means that the people see an inherent connection to their religion.

We conduct a number of different kinds of groups. There are rural women's and men's groups that meet once a week for 2-3 hours at a time, over the course of 4 months. These programs have the backing and financial support of UNIFEM. In these groups we see the psychosocial wellness and resiliency levels in the groups change, and we hear anecdotal evidence that family violence is less in those families where either the man or woman participated in our program.

In urban areas, we usually run workshops similar to the rural areas. Many participants are teachers and currently we have a number of trainings being conducted for kindergarten and pre-school teachers in Kabul. These programs are supported by AFSC and UNIFEM. In addition, AFSC funds one local agency that runs programs in areas of extreme poverty in urban Kabul. Most of these participants are returning refugees (from Iran or Pakistan), or are internally displaced people (people who fled their villages and now live mostly as squatters in poor semi-destroyed neighborhoods of Kabul).

There are also classes for non-governmental agencies that are held in 5 to 10 day courses, depending on the need of the agency. These are intensive classes and tend to be upper levels of Focusing, rather than the mixed psychosocial and Focusing programs described above. In all the programs, participants consistently identify Focusing and resiliency as the two topics that mean the most, and bring the greatest changes in their lives.

Recently the Ministry of Public Health for the Islamic Government of Afghanistan has asked AFSC to participate in the development of school mental health programs and in bringing the CFT model to their community health workers, so that psychosocial wellness can be mainstreamed and integrated in programs throughout Afghanistan.

Stories from Afghan Focusers:

Parveen, one of the participants of a workshop in Ghazni shared her story:

“I was a young girl of 14 when my father engaged me with the son of his friend who was living in Iran. People were saying that the person owned the factory where my father works. I was very much concerned about my engagement, but could not share it with any one. After two years I was married in the absence of my husband. Sometimes I was thinking that he might be an old man, and sometimes other bad thinking was hurting me. After three years my husband came from Iran. He was a drug-affected person and was using different types of drugs. After one month he went back to Iran and now this is the 15th year that I am liv-

ing with my father. My sisters, brothers and sisters-in-law are behaving very harshly with me. I feel very bad and am facing psychological problems. So many times I went to the Provincial Directorate of Ministry of Women Affairs, but nobody heard my voice. Thanks to you people for coming and conducting the workshop. Your lessons were really helpful and I am feeling better now.”

Abdul Muqem, a radio broadcasting professional and Focusing student, shared the Focusing he learned with his village. After a few lessons one of the village men who frequently argued with neighbors about the use of irrigation water, was able to stop in the midst of escalating a fight. He was so grateful for being able to notice his *inner violent guest*, and listen until it changed, that he helped the village set up Focusing lessons. They are now constructing a small building to house the Focusing workshops.

Laila Masjidi, Certified Focusing Trainer, shared about an old woman who came to a village training in Saeed Khel all crippled, hunched over with pain, pain especially in her legs and in her head. She reported feeling very unhealthy, and she required help walking to the workshop. After one week of Focusing, she walked hunched over, but by herself. She shared she was very interested in what she was learning. After one month she stood straight, walked well by herself, and said she felt very healthy. She cried when the workshop ended and expressed that it was very important for her.

Laila observed a woman in a workshop this summer who said on her first day, “I’m not normal. I am very sick and I don’t want to continue in the workshop.” Laila encouraged her to stay, saying that the good activity might help her be healthy. When this woman learned Focusing and used it, she changed and was very happy by the end. Another participant had very troubled emotions because of the wars in Afghanistan. She had lost her six children, and was so very sad. Also her husband was sick. She learned and used Focusing and taught her husband. Now they are happy. She told Laila they use Focusing when they have stress and it really can help them.

Aqmal Daudzai, Certified Focusing Trainer and university student, shared how he uses Focusing when he has anxiety about his papers and exams. He sits with his anxious inner guests, describes them, senses how they feel in his body, notices what they are about, and they shift after he has heard them, becoming calm. Then he is again able to study without the disruption of fear.

CONCLUSION

We no longer know how many people in Afghanistan have learned some simple, usable Focusing that bolsters resiliency in this troubled country. We do know that there have been more than 17,000 people through training programs in the past 5 years. It is our hope to share our vision that Focusing can be a part of community health teaching, and can spread widely where many people need basic psychosocial wellness support.

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Citation from Quran: <http://web.umn.edu/~msaumr/Quran/50.html>

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1 Ministry of Public Health officials put the figure at over 80% for all Afghan adults, according to MoPH staff. 28 September 2006.

NEW PATTERNS OF RELATING
TO THE NEW TOWN

THE TOWN AND HUMAN ATTENTION

Eugene T. Gendlin Ph.D.

(Presentation at the first FISS, August 25, 2006)

We are in the middle or the beginning stages of a really gigantic development of human beings. Partly my message is going to be: don't be discouraged. There has been an incredible development of masses of people all over the world in my lifetime, which is a little longer than yours — but not that much. Now, in a town that you've never heard of somewhere in Northern Ghana, a kid goes to the movies on Saturday, sees television all week, and knows everything that's going on — this is a tremendous development of people. There is literacy in half the world. Even where there is no literacy, there is tremendous awareness that a mass of people have gotten much more similar and much more developed. So that is the first thing I want to say.

Secondly, there has been a smaller development of millions of people who are now psychologically sophisticated. Not just in the West or East, but everywhere. What I mean is this: you sit on a bus and the woman behind you is telling her friend, for instance, "I am not his mother!" And you realize that there is a level of sophistication that has come psychologically to, certainly not the majority, not to the mass of people, but nevertheless to some seriously significant number (a hundred million or so...?) who are so much more aware. There are, so to speak, all of these so-called 'methods' from our global neighbors. There are all kinds of trainings, and interactions in energy, in Non Violent Communication, in Dialogue, and in a whole list of happenings that are now helping human beings develop and become increasingly more sophisticated — and this is happening worldwide. I'd call this a kind of minority, a creative minority (I hope!)

Here's a comparison: Some really major changes happened between agriculture and industry back 300 or 400 years ago, when the basic thing that people were doing changed from agriculture to industry. Agriculture used to take 99.9% of people's energy — just to grow food. There were very few people who had the time to devote to outside interests. Then it changed. A small percentage (maybe something like 5% of the world's population) needed to attend to agriculture, and 95% of the population was suddenly freed-up to do that other thing — that new thing. What was the new thing then? It was industry, trade, finance, and other new areas.

The world changed. It changed inside and outside. This split between inside and outside is something you have to *go across*. The split between individuals and society, between finding yourself and dialogue cannot be split — yet the external conditions had changed.

I'm saying, for example, that for industry everything changed. A man went to work in the factory, a kid went to school, a woman went to see her friends — all totally different people. The people that the man met in the factory were not the parents of the kids who went to

school, and not related to the friends that the woman had in the town. This new piece split up everything, and made all the conditions of living different.

So, some people say that it is external change that determined the difference in those people. But it also goes the other way. There was a *human development* for people — to learn how to run machinery, for example. They had to be taught how to read instructions; they had to be taught how to be careful with powerful machinery; they had to be taught to arrive on time at 8 o'clock in the morning because the whole factory couldn't operate properly unless everybody was there. There were designated assembly lines, and if two guys were missing the whole thing would stop! So everybody had to buy a watch, everybody had to learn numbers. This was the tremendous development of people, inside and outside.

And it's happening again. Because now it's enough for 5% of the population to work in industry and produce things. Look how much is produced and made in China, for instance, while we are doing something else over here. And what are we doing? What's the new product?

Well, up to here I am sure I am right. From here on in — we'll see. I think the new product is called INTERHUMAN ATTENTION. I think what people are doing in developed countries is *paying attention to each other*. Some people call that the service industry. Some people call it the business world. It's a lot about having meetings the whole day and writing memos to each other.

Now we are still in a phase. There is a characteristic phase that took a long time when the forms of society were still involved with agriculture (even though the main activity was no longer agricultural, and took revolutions to get extricated from...) So if people wanted to ship some products from Marseille to the port down on the Mediterranean and up to Paris, they had to pay 20 different land-owners fees along the road. They had to stop every time, and do all kinds of burdensome things in order to ship the products. Why? Because the 'forms' people used to *relate to each other socially* were still from agriculture — but what was really going on was no longer from agriculture.

So, I am saying that this is where we are right now. We sit on the expressway; it's stuck every single morning at 8:30. We don't even have to get where we're going by 9 o'clock because there is no longer an assembly line. You could stay in your pajamas and write those memos. OK there are meetings but *We* are stuck. You see, we are selling by the hour. The industrial system works by hourly labor. The farm doesn't of course, but on the farm you don't count the hours. You do such-and-such in the winter, and this other thing in the spring, and then something else in the summer. But industrial society has to have everything by the numbers: the time, the money, the exchange, the labor — all of it. And we are still there selling human attention by the hour — it's called therapy! — a bit ridiculous, but that's the form we are currently in. Actually, you are not replaceable. It's not the hours; it is *you* that the person comes to. But then you are on vacation, and you say, "Well, for the next 4 weeks go see doctor... (so-and-so)". That's ridiculous! Doctor so-and-so can't replace you. But that's the way we have it "in case of emergency". We are still in the old forms and we are going to be in the old forms for a long time.

I look back to this history and I wonder: What were the new people doing? But we are the new people... What were the new people doing *then*?

First of all, they lived in towns. The other people were on the land. So, I would like to introduce a new term and call us: THE TOWN. My meaning contains all the new methods, not just Focusing. All the new methods, all the psychological sophistication, all the interactional training, all the therapy, all of it — this is THE TOWN. And we need to become conscious that we are producing a new product. The product is HUMAN ATTENTION — and the product isn't very good right now, nor is the attention — not yet.

However, that said, there is an interesting phenomena going on. You see, back in the Middle Ages, the town's people were important to the land-holding people, because the Duke — or the person who owned the whole province — needed the towns; consequently the towns were given a Charter. This meant that the town had certain rights (as a town) — and they were very important rights. If the serfs that were owned by the landowner ran away into the town, the landowner couldn't go into town and get them back, so it was really important that towns had certain 'rights', so they could grow and develop. The landholder needed the town. He needed the town because the town was the trade center. If he wanted something that didn't grow on the farm, the landowner had to depend on the town. The town could get him wine, spices, silk, jewelry, and all sorts of goods that he thought he needed — so the landowner tolerated the town. Are you following me?

Currently, the business world is looking to this new TOWN, to learn *how* to pay attention. This is universal in the business world. It is well known that in business more than half of the malfunctions that occur have to do with the failure to pay attention properly. Right attention is needed and paid for to get better quality.

I am saying that there are three really important developments, one inside the other. First, there is the broad development of the human species. Information that used to belong to only a very very, tiny, minority is now available all over. Inside of that large development there is secondly what I call "THE TOWN," a peculiar new kind of people who are specialized in attention — in raising the quality of the interhuman attention — and inside of the Town is a third development, Focusing. I think that the center of this Town is Focusing — is us.

The very broad human development has a lot to do with television. It has to do with the internet (now recently), and it has to do with radio before that. For example, back probably 40 years ago, peasants in China all got little radios. Yes, they got them because the central government wanted to control the people, but meanwhile they developed, they learned about their whole world, they (the peasants) are no longer what peasants used to be.

The Town is a small proportion of the population but still a significant number, millions of people... all those engaged in new human processes, psychological, spiritual, interactional. These processes did not exist and were utterly unknown only two generations ago. Now the Town is teaching these processes and Focusing is a major, still further development of human beings and interhuman attention.

Now of course I am making us the center, but that is a human tendency. I do think we are raising the quality of the product to a completely new level...if we can listen...

I have a wonderful quote from Afghanistan. I think that the work being done there is probably one of the most significant things happening right now. So would you please, when you have time, go to the web and click Afghanistan (on the www.focusing.org website). There are three reports there from Afghanistan, and more reports still being sent. One quote I want to share with you.

This is about a village woman from Afghanistan and what she said after a workshop (teaching Focusing to village people, not to therapists). She said: “I went home and I listened to my sick uncle and he brought all his medicines for me to see. And I listened to him. He was very happy and told me his whole heart.”

So there is something that we are bringing to the middle of this whole development — which goes right in. It doesn’t require a huge amount training or complicated theory. She learned something essential (*Listening* to help someone else Focus) — and she went home and just did it — and it worked right away.

The people who are in control right now — and of course there are different people in different kinds of control all over the place — these people don’t have it yet. They are still learning from the **town** more general kinds of things, such as how to listen and interact. Right now in my country, the war party is in control — but they don’t really know what they are doing. First of all, they are having meetings. If you really track what is going on you’ll find... they are considering, they are planning, they are doing what management always does: recycling ideas — yet they can only manage what fits those categories. So what happens? They consider: Is it to go to war with Iran, or it isn’t? Will they support such-or-such government and such-and-such place, or they won’t? The choices that they have when they plan are already cut in such pieces that the situation cannot be coped with adequately. They don’t seem to know about the gigantic development of human beings — and they don’t seem to have a ‘way’ to think about it. They are still bombing peasants. They don’t understand that they are bombing people mostly just like themselves. There is no category for it — yet. But we’ll bring them a category...right?

You *can* look forward to a time when things are going to get a lot better than they are right now. Please don’t be discouraged. If you watch management, both politically and in the business world, these people do want to learn this missing piece. It’s well known that something is missing. I read articles in the business paper informing us that things are no longer the same, always repetitious — and that you can’t routinize them. They want to have small groups because they see that it no longer works to direct their various matters from the top down. That’s the way it used to be done. Now they are all talking about a way that ‘something’ is missing. Of course something is missing! They don’t know how to relate even to each other — let alone to these whole new complicated developments. But I believe that it is coming — and it is coming a lot faster than things used to come historically — and it will come even faster/further in your lifetime. When I started all this, I was a very weird person. I didn’t really change. The world has changed a lot, and I am now a whole lot less weird than I used to be! This will happen to you also.

There is something though that I would like to point out that is difficult. This “**town**” that I am talking about is not conscious of itself. We are conscious that we are teaching (all

of what we teach) and we are teaching it to whoever will listen ... teaching it to villages, teaching it to management, it doesn't matter — teach it to anybody. We are teaching all right, but we are not conscious; I don't yet think even of each other as the **town**. When I say: "Oh...learn everything else, but please don't just do Focusing." I am talking about the "**town**": We are still all these entities, and if you just learn my thing — it is never fully true. You need more than five things.

If we were conscious of ourselves as producing a new kind of product, there is a different world that comes with it — and it is a much better world, where people are aware of each other as people. Everything will be different. It is already becoming different. However, it is not getting different fast enough so that you feel good when you read the paper — but please read the paper. A great many Focusing people I know are no longer reading the paper — it hurts too much. And they feel helpless to do anything about it anyway.

So there is something there about *fresh thinking* that I want to point to.

My colleagues at the University of Chicago, who are high-powered intellectuals, now believe that they can't think about economics. They view it as a kind of science that they don't understand, but highly respect. Economics uses computer models, and graphs and curves that they don't understand. So economics is left to a small group. If you talk to these official economists you discover that they don't have — and don't want to have — any idea about what they are actually doing to the world. They are busy designing computer models that will do what they want them to do — which is mostly to make predictions and profits for banks, but that only works to some extent, until all the banks use the same programs!

They (the proverbial 'they') lower the taxes of wealthy people and then cut social expenditures to make up for the cuts. They say the money will be invested in more business activity and more jobs. And 'they' are lying. They've been lying now for thirty years (or more) on this point. Some of them know they are lying and some don't. But YOU can think about this — not about economic computer models (leave those to those people who want those things). You can think about the fact that if social expenditures are cut, then people have less money to buy things, therefore companies cannot invest to produce more. If you take money out of circulation the demand goes down. Companies will produce less here, not more. They will invest overseas, not here. Why then would lower taxes for rich people create more investments and jobs? You already know that this can't be true. That's very simple. Now, if that's economics...well...don't be scared of it. Let's be able to *think freshly* in that kind of place — not giving up on it because we can't do anything about it anyway. It is important to realize that we *can* think about it.

Here's an interesting example: Japan and South Korea have a different economic model. The government ensures that most money is invested in the country. Some business people actually get incredibly rich there, but the government ensures that money stays invested in the country. Early on in South Korea the government told business people, "You can do anything you want and we will support it, but if you send money out of the country, you go to jail." This is an economic model that is very different from ours — and very successful. You won't read about it in the American paper though. Why? Because our government is all in favor of opening everything up, so that a few individual investors from

anywhere in the world are able to buy everything up. They are building things for everybody else — not staying invested from within.

I think this is going to change. It's going to change because we can't bomb people out of whatever they are doing anymore. The process of change is occurring. At the moment, there are no categories to define this change, so the policy makers aren't thinking about it yet. But they will. They are already thinking about how their military strategy doesn't work.

The United States puts a lot of pressure on Japan and South Korea to get them to "reform" and "open" their economies, and these countries have resisted that. They have said, "No, we have our own model and we are building our own country." South Korea has imitated a model that Japan has been using now for a hundred years, maybe more; building their country from within.

There are very good reasons that people don't want to read the newspaper. Partly, the news often makes us feel bad; partly, there's a feeling that we can't do anything about it. Sometimes the paper seems just plain dull. Everything is cut in terms of certain pro and con issues — both sides of which are clearly wrong. For example, either you support the mother and don't give a damn about the infant, or else you support the infant and don't give a damn about the mother. But why do I have to choose either of those? Either you are for continuing the hopeless war, or else you are for bringing our troops home, giving up, making the country look like terrible embarrassment. Well, if I had to choose, I'd rather they came home, but obviously that's not the point. Why must it be bombing military attacks on people, or nothing?

We have vast economic power that has not even begun to reach most populations. Most of our allies in underdeveloped countries are unable to provide even minimal government services to their people. Such governments have completely failed in most of the Islamic world. The only services for people, the only clinics, the only schools, the only clothing, the only food being distributed, is by groups who are trying to organize people against the West. By one estimate, there are 30,000 such schools in just one of these countries. As long as these groups are the only ones, how can we blame people for supporting the only model that exists? There might be some other way to get them clothes and schools; unfortunately, the scale of such an effort is still far from being considered.

Reading the paper, you have to be alert to pick up significant items that appear now and then — and you have to remember them, because they will never be mentioned again. Then, with awareness, you can begin to think into the detailed texture beyond the pre-cut alternatives.

The point I am trying to make is this: The way the issues are cut, we can know in advance that both sides are going to be wrong. Either you want to kill all of these people, or you want to kill all of those people. And then they want us to choose. I say, "to hell with that...," but then we have to allow ourselves to think about the issues in some new way. We have to ask: "Does that really make sense?"

The latest process that we developed is TAE, which is teaching people that they can actually think freshly. The message is: YOU can! What we learned in school was that we couldn't. We were not supposed to think freshly. We were supposed to learn 20 concepts and

keep rearranging them. That was the only way to get good grades — so fine, we learned how to do that. But that is not very appealing, or inspiring.

Thinking is something else. Thinking is like Focusing, but in Focusing we usually deal with a particular situation. In Thinking we would be saying, “Well, what is wrong there with this issue — that either I am supposed to do this or that? It can’t be like that. Why do I feel it can’t be like that?” Then you’ve already got something. If you allow yourself to let fresh language flow out, you can lay out different parts of the issue. You say, “Oh look, I’ve got five things now — where as before I only had “uh?” Now I have five things. Well, let me list 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 . . . Oh... there’s the 6th, well how do they go together?” And *in there* we have a way for people to be able to think.

Of course not everybody wants to think, that’s fine. TAE is not only for thinking, TAE is also to let people say — and hear themselves say — what they *are living through*. Right now, the public language has few categories for the intricate texture of experience. And it is with the subject of categories that I want to end. I want to come back to where I started.

This whole philosophy allows you to realize — and it only takes you a few moments — that what we care about *doesn’t come in categories*. The reality of other people, of ourselves, of our kids, or something odd and nameless, such as your talent, what you deeply wish to be doing, will not/does not (fortunately!) fit into the existing categories. It doesn’t manifest all chopped up on graph paper; it doesn’t come out like that! So we don’t have to stay with the categories that are given to us. In fact, we cannot stay within them.

And, we must not give up. Things are changing, and in very interesting ways. We can think about them if we don’t fall for “economics”, or assume that we consist of “neurology”, or any of those wonderful analytical tools that people make up. The people who have charge of everything are still thinking in the categories, so please don’t be discouraged just because things aren’t going so well at the moment. It is changing.

That’s all. Thank you.