

## FOCUSING HAPPIER

---

*Carol Bellin*

---

I wasn't raised to be happy. I was taught that happy people were suspect; they were probably doing something wrong or weren't paying attention to life's realities.

In my twenties I wasn't that happy most of the time, but I had hope that things could still turn out okay. There was all of life ahead of me. However, when I got to my 35th birthday, I began facing the fact that I was not living the life I wanted and thought I should be living. It happened on that birthday that a friend gave me a copy of a Shakti Gawain book, whose title I cannot now remember.

Gawain's book filled me with new purpose. Yes, I *could* create the life I wanted. All I needed to do was think positive thoughts. My problem was those other not-positive thoughts that came creeping in. In fact, the more I tried to think positively, the more desperate I became. I realized that by saying what I wanted, I was bringing up the resistance I had to actually having the conditions I desired. But how to release the resistance was a mystery to me.

At age 41, I discovered Focusing. The book jumped off the shelf of the bookstore into my hand, and I had to take it home and read it late into the night. Now I knew what to do with that resistance! I was at one of the early week-longs given by The Focusing Institute in Chicago in 1986. During that same visit I took a weekend workshop with Gene Gendlin and went to a couple of Changes groups at Bebe Simon's (a long-time Focusing teacher). I went home fired up and moved forward with a passion in this new direction.

For some years I was a regular at Institute events and participated with enthusiasm in whatever way I could. I also went into therapy with a Focusing therapist and did some good work as I started to understand myself better. The change began when I got in touch with some newly discovered traumatic event from my past, and my response was to sigh and think, "Now I'll need to spend the next 6 months working this one out." I realized I was tired of raking up the past, which I hadn't enjoyed the first time I experienced it. There must be another way.

I spent the next several years trying to find out what that way was. I began a Master's in Leisure Studies because the philosophy of play was so much like Focusing. I offered Self-Discovery Playgroups, which people did find helpful, but while those groups provided positive insight for participants, they weren't doing what I wanted, which was to move life forward. I did a lot of reading about manifestation, books I can't remember now. I studied Science of Mind, but for me it was same-old-same-old of just trying to think about the positive. Still, I kept working with whatever I found, wanting to use the felt sense to move forward.

I had been looking forward to age 50. Much of the psychological material I had read talked about women coming into their own lives in their 50's, and I couldn't wait. The year

I turned 50, I began the 12-year midlife journey that finally brought me to the Central Valley of California, a place of traditional values and conservative thought. I came to be near children and grandchildren, but it was not a place that I imagined would welcome anything I had to offer. However, it was here where I got a puzzle piece that began to make sense of a lot of other thoughts and experiencing.

In my early 40's, I was given an introductory cassette to "The Teachings of Abraham" interpreted through Esther Hicks ([www.abraham-hicks.com](http://www.abraham-hicks.com)). I had enjoyed it at the time, but was too busy with Focusing, moving from place to place, and raising my youngest child to follow up on the information. After moving here, I began to attend a Yoga class and found the instructor to be a student of the work. I borrowed some tapes from her and then got a subscription for myself. Finally, I had found an approach to the idea of creative living/manifestation that I could make sense of. Everything else wanted me to *think "as if"* or *act "as if"*; Abraham asked me to *feel as if*. The Abraham work also doesn't create an expectation of a leap into bliss, but rather provides an incremental movement forward in the direction of feeling happier. Gendlin taught me that the felt sense carries in it the present moment *and the next step forward*. We can use the *now felt sense* as a thread into the past. Step by felt step, we can also use it as a thread into the future.

Before I go farther, I would like to say that the definition of Focusing I am using in my Life Creation work is a very basic one — and one that is applicable at any age, but I especially encourage those who are getting on in years to consider the following as a process that can take us from our beginnings of aging, right into our final years.

No matter in what context I use Focusing, I am always being present to a bodily felt sense, listening for *its* reality, using my intellect to find words or symbols that fit how the felt sense feels. This "being with" can come in a Focusing session with a partner or on my own. It can also happen in life as I am hanging out with the felt sense of a new concept or perception in my process, seeing how it plays out in my living. If I look at things from this Focusing point of view, how does that change how I interact with others, do my job, or wash my dishes?

One of the shifts I have made as I integrate Focusing with the Abraham work is to welcome the times when life isn't behaving the way I would like it to. Abraham calls this "contrast", and it is a part of the creative process. To create something different, there must be a preference for something new or more, and the function of contrast is to give rise to the preference. So my general attitude when times get difficult is one of excitement about being right on the edge of something new. Because as soon as I say, "I'd rather . . ." I have started on a new adventure.

Abraham says that desires are what bring creative life energy through us. I am talking about that special energy that is accompanied by a wonderful feeling when the inner being just lights up and you can feel that flow of passion and possibility through your body. Then, of course, you go off to make it happen, and sometimes things get difficult and the passion drifts away. A desire that you think you can't or shouldn't have will cause you a great deal of pain, while desires that you imagine as possible bring a flow of good feeling. The trick is in believing that getting what you want is a viable option. I can activate this process with

Focusing. When that first flush comes through, I connect with the felt sense of it, welcome it, make space for it, and let it know I love it. I mark that felt sense so I can recognize how it lives in my body. I also notice any parts of me that are nervous, scared, tight, doubting. I welcome those, too, also with love. Each of those places is another point for growth and change. I will get to those places in right timing, as they come into my life, which they will. But how do I keep that fabulous flow alive?

Well, here is where the getting happier comes in. When you think of this totally wonderful thing or condition, which you now have in thought/feeling form, remember that the reason you want this is because you believe that you will be happier in the having of it. Part of reaching forward for that preference, which is present in your felt experience but not yet in your life, is to let yourself be happy anyway. You might try inviting the felt sense that is just a little bit happier than you are right now. *What would it feel like if I were just a little happier right now?* There is a certain amount of discipline involved in this process. Most of us have well-developed belief systems that say that other people's actions 'make' us feel certain ways. The truth is that we have choices about how to feel. You will find that being happier becomes a real priority when you genuinely want to change your life.

Many of us have a hard time insisting on happiness for ourselves. "How can I be happy when . . . ?" How can you not? People will do as they do, wars, famines, and natural disasters happen, all out of our control. What we can control is our experience of life. We all know this, yet continue in thinking we cannot be happy with life as it is, only when it changes. However, when we inquire of our despairing or frustrated felt sense, what it needs from us in order to feel happier, the felt sense will tell us; it will give us a little bit of relief, an opening to pleasure. As we become happier, we become an inspiration to others to make changes for themselves, and we can support others from a place of strength.

Being happier also gets easier when we realize that we are usually working the system too hard, whether it be with affirmations, or ambition and hard work. Becoming happier usually means relaxing a bit, opening up to the unknown, taking our finger off the button. I have found that just being happier about a situation seems to resolve it much more easily than if I become intensely motivated to *do something*. I try to take only an action that is lined up with my inner sense of pleasure and rightness in the action. I want to make clear that I do go to work, take care of my home, study, and do whatever else I do in life without waiting for inspiration to strike. However, when I have a particular goal, I take care not to do too much about it, but let the opportunity for right action come to me.

Meanwhile, am I doing nothing? No. I am becoming happier. I am using my felt sense to bring me to the next step in my process, moving slowly and carefully towards my goal of being the person who will have that new thing, condition or situation. I will be somewhat different than the way I am now. I don't know what that will look like, but I do know that I will be happier. I will discover the details as I go along that path.

A Focusing Happier session would probably look like any Focusing session in many ways. The major difference is that we are not looking for the reason why we feel bad, but for a different way to perceive it, to find a way to be happy that includes the feeling bad.

Life is as it is. Choosing to allow life to bring us pleasure, peace and joy is true emotional freedom.

That difference of perspective manifests in several ways. For instance, we are not only looking for the difficult issues. We also want to identify the places that feel wonderful and encourage them to expand their presence in our lives. When you run into one of those warm, open, expansive feelings, milk it, asking, *What is it about right now that feels so good to me? Let me count all the inner and outer triggers for this upwelling of well-being.* Be clear with yourself about what brings you peace and contentment. Make space for new parts of yourself to become active in your process and in your life.

On the other hand, if you are working with something like a wall in your chest, an upset in your gut, then you might ask some different questions. *What is going on here? What is the pattern of resistance I'm feeling?* It is not necessary, in this context, to go back and “deal with” what caused this upset feeling. Misery is not something we want to milk, but to leave it in the past where it belongs. We just want to see the pattern of the resistance and the ways this pattern inhibits our experience of life and what triggers it. Once we understand what those are, we can ask, *Can I be happy in my life with this resistance present?* Asking this question is crucial. Always, you want to be just a little bit happier than you are right now, exactly the way life is.

This does not mean you are stuck in that same place. Actually, you are now really free to make a change because you are no longer a victim of your process. You can now ask, *How would I prefer to feel? How can I be in life differently so that something new happens?*

I can tell you from my experience that Focusing and living in a way that expects new pleasures to continually unfold truly enhances my experience in these “golden years.” There are so many opportunities to create preferences that carry us forward in life. Whatever our situation, there is always something more we are inviting into life as we continue to give our attention to becoming just a little bit happier.

Three years ago I was worried about the lack of passion in my life. Though I deeply love my grandchildren, I had nothing going for myself. A high level of enthusiasm is one of the touchstones of my personality, and I was beginning to feel old and purposeless. Then, at the end of a long-term substitute teaching job, I heard myself saying to the school principal, “I don’t want to leave.” Within weeks I was enrolled in an internship credential program, and am now almost at the end of my second year teaching Special Education as I near Medicare age. Though teaching is likely to be a somewhat short-lived career, my students are teaching me such valuable lessons in unconditional loving that I would not want to be doing anything else, anywhere else, at this point in time. It has been beneficial for me in other ways as well. I look and feel younger than I did when I started this very stressful, yet rejuvenating path. This whole new life came out of working with my preferences, paying attention to becoming happier, and going one step at a time.

I am also beginning to prepare for a return to teaching Focusing. For some years, I was in a process of such intense and rapid change that I had to give my Self my full attention. I worked at jobs that required little consciousness, like selling fabric and mattresses.

For about ten years I did substitute teaching, touching down here and there in the world of education, making no commitments. I have come to new ground here, in the midst of the fields that grow fruit, alfalfa, cotton, nuts, and grapes for wine and raisins that supply the rest of the country. This agricultural environment, so much like my Midwestern birthplace, but with me different within it, has grounded me and even with my very busy life has given me a resting place. Here, Focusing clients and students are appearing here and there, and I have had a chance to reflect on the ways I used the integration of Focusing and the Abraham teachings and to begin to prepare a body of work. I'm excited to see where this takes me!

My mid-life journey has become my aging journey. I plan to keep on wanting things and becoming happier in the expectation of them until I am completely satisfied and am ready to move forward in other dimensions.