

NEW BEGINNINGS

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It was the beginning for me. And yet it was also a converging of all felt time, of all my experiences and skills up until now. And it was also timeless. All of this came together for me in the same moment: a precious paradox.

I sat in a large circle of people as a first time attendee of the Focusing Institute Summer School. Kevin McEvenue was leading a session on Wholebody Focusing and Aging. After Kevin opened the session with some thoughts about his own experiences of aging and an invitation for us to do the same, he moved his chair around the inside of the circle to sit in front of each person who volunteered to Focus with him on what was coming for them about their own aging.

As each person Focused, I experienced a growing connectivity to myself, as well as to each person Focusing. I was resonating with each of them, with their process and with many of the feelings and issues that arose. An aliveness was growing in me, and I sensed an aliveness growing in the whole group simultaneously. I experienced this field of vitality supporting me personally, and I felt moved to volunteer for my very first Focusing session.

In the three years leading up to that moment, issues about changes in my physical body, injuries and aging had been brewing. I had held them close, being with them privately, often uncomfortably. Shame had kept me quiet.

As Kevin moved his chair to sit in front of me, he said ‘hello’ in his twinkly way. I immediately felt at ease with him. I was in friendly territory. We seemed to chat a bit, which felt simple and easy. And yet, here were these painful issues brewing in me; here I was embarking on an unfamiliar process, as well as speaking in front of this huge group!

Kevin asked me to take some time feeling my feet on the ground, myself seated on the chair, and the support the ground brings. This was safe, known territory for me from other work I have done, and I was happy to be invited to reconnect with it. As I did so, a surprising shift happened: this huge group of people shifted in my perception from being a daunting presence who conjured worries about my performance, to a supportive, resonating organism that I was somehow now part of.

With that support, intense energy moved through my body with powerful aliveness. I felt strong, expansive and very present. And I concurrently dropped into a spectrum of feelings connected to my body limitations: my feeling of shame that my body could not do what it had been able to in the past—a growing sense that there was an early childhood issue connected with this—as well as something about the death of my mother . . . and as well there was a threat to my professional identity as a somatic educator for forty five years . . . I recognized the interconnection of these painful issues. Their complexity and intensity felt

almost overwhelming, and at the same time, I felt a relief for it all to begin to emerge into the open, to speak it, and to be heard in such a resonant field.

Kevin gently redirected my attention back to the support of the ground. As I reconnected to what I now recognize as Grounded Presence in the Wholebody Focusing process, my feelings of wellbeing, wholeness, and empowerment reemerged. This was a bit confusing. On one hand, the enormity of a shameful issue came forth, and at the same time, here was my empowered, present and very wise self.

Kevin asked, 'Can you be with both simultaneously? Both these shrinking feelings of shame about physical limitations and as well, this vibrant, alive, energized empowered self?'

WHAT? HOLD BOTH?

At that moment, a profound shift occurred. Until that moment when he had requested me to hold both, my consciousness (which in many ways was quite developed through decades of meditation, Authentic Movement and Feldenkrais work) often shrank when I confronted a powerful, shameful internal feeling. I would literally shrink in my self-perception as well as in the organization of my contracting body when these feelings came up. My awareness functioned a bit like a game of tennis, with the ball bouncing back and forth from one side of the court to the other. I could put the ball into the side of my expanded awareness, wisdom self, alive and energized. Then the ball would bounce to the other side of the court when feelings of self-doubt, unworthiness, shame, etc., arose. Back and forth went my consciousness. I could now see the pattern of the ball going from one side to the other, literally experiencing the shifts of state and of self-image.

WHAT? HOLD BOTH? AT THE SAME TIME?

I felt an expansion pop open. I somehow grew bigger in my consciousness, feeling I was somehow making more room for both experiences of myself. This bigger space created an alchemical process that was not of my doing.

I became more relaxed and energized at the same time. This larger part of me, vibrant and strong, like a good mother, was holding the shameful feelings. As there was more room in me for the safe uncovering of the hidden parts, I no longer felt the isolation connected with covering and compensating for these feelings. Instead of aloneness, I felt potential and possibility.

As I stayed with this, I began to feel compassion towards the shame. The shame was not 'all of me' As I kept it in good company, I could give the complexity of the feelings more space to 'be' without their dominating my sense of self. I could more softly see and accept that the complexity had origins in many layers in the unfolding of my life. My Grounded Presence soothed and held all of this, gently letting my view readjust. The shift from holding these feelings IN to holding them with Grounded Presence freed me to feel myself anew, and formed the base for ultimately letting these layers move in me in their own right tim-

ing, unforced. When held this way, they had their own right knowing of how to organically unfold over whatever time was necessary.

What flowed from this experience over time was a shift in my emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual perception. With that shift came a new ability. I can notice when the 'ball' of my awareness is in the shrinking side of the court. I can recognize it as a part of me. Then I can invite My Grounded Presence, reconnect with my wholeness, and hold both. I can invoke this as a living practice whenever I perceive the shrinking. While this process is most powerful when practiced in relationship with another person or persons, I can also practice it alone.

Beyond practicing, 'holding both' has created a life-changing perception, a meta perspective. I can feel that my consciousness has fundamentally shifted, and it happened all at once in that session. It will never be the same as it was before that day, even when the ball is on the shrinking side of the court for a prolonged time. It is just waiting to be called back into Grounded Presence, and eventually, it always is. My consciousness holds this larger view now as a way of living.

Donna Blank, MS, GCFP/T, LMA, has, since the 60's, explored and taught in many dimensions of somatic experience and awareness, and woven through the arts (dance and sculpting), education, the Feldenkrais Method, Laban Movement Analysis, Authentic Movement and meditation. She is a trainer in the Feldenkrais Method and maintains private practices in Embodied Awareness in the greater Washington DC area, and the Hudson Valley, NY.

Donna is currently training with Kevin McEvenue in Wholebody Focusing and additionally, in the Advanced Certification program in Wholebody Focusing. She can be reached at donnablank@gmail.com