

## THE SHORTEST FOCUSING SESSION EVER

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*Bala Jaison, Ph.D.*

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This may be the shortest article I've ever written—but then Focusing is like that, isn't it... Sometimes we work on a 'something' for days, weeks, months, waiting for the famous *aha!* Other times, without warning, a grand epiphany just seems to come out of nowhere, and we are amazed, stymied, a bit freaked-out by the profundity of the seemingly out-of-the-blue experience that has hit us with such a bolt. But of course, those of us who know, practice, live Focusing, already know that this 'sudden knowing' isn't exactly accurate, isn't exactly 'sudden', because we've probably been 'sitting with' *it* for who knows how long...!

My big *aha* came in Chicago. It was the early 80's and I had moved there for six months to work with and learn from Gene Gendlin and Mary McGuire, and to help establish and organize the original Week-long trainings... (that's another story!)

It was a rough period in my life in certain ways. I was grappling with many things (irrelevant to this article/memoir). I had some important life-altering decisions to make. My husband was staying in Connecticut with his father, whose health was rapidly declining, so we were both away from our home and each other, and had rented our house out for 6 months, so we could each do what we wanted to do or (in his case) had to do.

In one way, being in Chicago was a great and freeing experience, learning so many new things, especially about the fine-points and intricacies of Focusing. In another way I was carrying a lot of uncertainty in my life, questions to be answered, decisions that eventually had to be made... which takes me on to the memoir...

I had been grappling with a sense of losing control of many aspects of my life. Of course in our work, people talk endlessly about "letting go of control", but we know that really letting go is "easier said than done".

Anyway, one night I had a dream. I'll say here first, that I'm just awful (as in pathetically hopeless) about remembering my dreams. Gendlin says that we should keep a pad and pencil by the bedside and write down our dreams immediately, but what usually wakes me up in the first place is needing to use the bathroom, so by the time I've taken that little journey, the dream is long gone.

This dream however hit me like a bolt, a jolt, or as the saying goes, "a ton of bricks". It is a dream that will I never forget—ever—(bathroom or not!)

I dreamt that I had MS (multiple sclerosis), however in the dream, while whatever physical ailment I was experiencing was called 'MS', it actually looked more like Parkinson's Disease: flailing of limbs, waving of arms, legs buckling under, unable to walk or balance properly, and complete lack of physical control and coordination.

The dream was very short. I was standing on a busy, bustling street corner waiting for the light to change from red to green, in order to cross the street. The location could have been Times Square in New York, or some other very busy intersection of a large city, maybe it was even Chicago—I don't remember the where—just that the location was a major U.S. city, with an unusually wide intersection, and a very high volume of traffic.

As I started to cross the street (when the light changed from red to green), my legs came buckling out from under me. In the dream, I didn't actually fall down (which was peculiar because my legs had no strength) but rather, kept watching with panic and horror at the total lack of control I felt in my legs as they kept wobbling and buckling. I experienced the most intense and overwhelming fear—imagining a fall and then being run over by a car. No matter how hard I tried to balance, my arms continued flailing about, and my about-to-collapse legs continued to be totally devoid of control.

That was the whole dream—and—it is as vivid right now in the writing, as it was then in the dreaming. I had no idea what the significance of the dream was/meant, but I couldn't wait to see Mary McGuire to work on it.

The dream also put me into a serious state of panic about something else. I really had no idea how to interpret it, hence, I 'made up' that the universe was telling me that I had an undiagnosed illness: MS? Parkinson's disease? Worse? Whatever the illness was, I was certain that the dream was telling me that I was going to die very soon. My life was going to come to an end. All that to say that by the time Mary and I finally met up I was in a bit-of-a-state. (UNDERSTATEMENT!)

I sat before her thinking that I would tell her the dream, and together we would both grieve my imminent departure from this world. Very sad...the end of my life, no week-longs...I'd come to Chicago for nothing...the end.

And now, the shortest part and the famous *aha*—or—the shortest Focusing session ever!

I sat before Mary and told her the dream. With an expression of gentle curiosity and empathy she simply said, "What does MS mean?" And I said, almost without pausing, "Letting go of control..." *AHA!!*... Yes, that was *IT!...!!*

My whole current life flashed before me—my natural instinct toward order—my discomfort with '*not knowing*'. I was being asked...being *told* (by an inner voice more powerful than mine) to let go of control, to allow life *to be*, to not try to orchestrate everything. That was *IT!* That is what the dream meant: *Letting go of control!* It was bang-on, or, as we say in Focusing—a true *felt-shift!*

After I came back to my senses (still trying to grasp that I wasn't going to die), I was totally astounded by the imagery—so brief: trying to cross a street, yet so profound: losing control with MS.

That dream took place a long time ago, but what I learned has stayed alive in me all these many years, and I shall remember always that...

- The Focusing process has a *life of its own*, separate from any ‘control’ that we might want to have over the process.
- No matter how hard we try to take ‘control’ of matters, when we allow the felt-sense to ‘speak its mind’, *it* knows something that we don’t; there is no pushing, shoving, altering, or manipulating a felt-sense. Said another way, the felt-sense *always knows what is right*, (whether *we* like it or not!) and that *knowing* is something to be revered and honored.
- Wisdom is revealed to us in many ways: In Focusing, it is through the bodily felt-sense; in Meditation is it through the ‘higher mind’. The connection between body/mind—the famous ‘both/and’—is needed to experience full congruency in our being—I call it *think/feel*.
- And finally, my least favorite concept (then) has become my most favorite concept (now): *Making friends with not-knowing...*

My wish for myself, and others, is the beauty of full connectedness at all levels—think/feel, both/and, body/mind. May we experience the famous ‘match’ or ‘fit’ between all levels of consciousness, as often as is humanly possible.

Thank you Mary McGuire. Thank you Gene Gendlin.

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*Her numerous workshops always have a leaning toward conflict-resolution and peacemaking. She had been editing this Folio for over 20 years—with joy!*

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