

## A SPONTANEOUS EXPERIENCE OF FOCUSING

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After I first gulped down Ann Weiser Cornell's book *The Radical Acceptance of Everything*, immediately the thought came: "This is what I have been looking for all my life, but I didn't even realize it!"

Later on, though, it came to me that there was an earlier time—about three decades ago—that I very explicitly began looking for what I finally found in Focusing.

I began looking for *it* because of a spontaneous experience I had of Focusing long before I could have given that experience a name of any kind.

### THE CONTEXT

I had been married for about five years. For many years, beginning long before I was married, I tended to carry a sense of low-key depression. It was difficult for me to express anger.

My husband and I were having difficulties, and we had decided to separate for a while in order to provide some space for each of us.

Then one night, we had a conversation in which it became clear it was time to go ahead and get divorced once and for all.

### SOMETHING COMES

I was filled with a tremendous rage—a level of rage I had never allowed myself to *feel* before. I started shouting at him angrily. At one point he implied I was out of control and hysterical. This enraged me even more.

This was not the Focusing part!

### GETTING BIGGER THAN WHAT COMES

But I think it did begin here because my voice, while still loud, instantly became quite firm: "I am NOT shouting because I am hysterical. I am shouting because I am ANGRY." At this point, as thunderously powerful as it was, I was no longer consumed by it. I was bigger than the anger. There was me, and there was this powerful feeling inside me that *I was allowing to be here*.

## THE FELT SENSE DEVELOPS

My husband left. I sat down at the top of the building stairway leading up to our apartment. It was nighttime, and it was dark. Sitting there, I became aware of a downward sensation. I felt this downward movement deep inside my lower belly. Down, down, down.

## BEING WITH

I cannot remember precisely now the entire sensation of the anger. What I can remember even now was the sensation of falling downward. There was a depth and fullness to this sensation. Not plummeting downward out of control, but moving downward the way an elevator in a 200-story building might move if it were plunging down from the 200th floor to the basement with no stops in between.

I was observing this moving downward, as well as feeling the full intensity of it. I was there with this elevator-moving-downward-very-fast feeling in my belly. I would not describe this movement as deliberate.

What was deliberate was allowing this moving downward intensity to be there, just exactly as it was, even if there was also a feeling that it might never stop until it was “too late.”

One reason that I have never thought that being “Present” with a feeling had anything to do with “toning it down” is that this was *not* a toned down feeling. I had no idea what would happen when the elevator hit bottom, and I was determined to stay with it, feeling that intense downward sensation, from beginning to end, no matter what.

I was being with it on its downward trajectory, feeling it, watching it. I did not feel one bit removed from the experience—and at the same time, there was a sense that I had the power to stop it at any point.

There, alone, at the top of the stairs, I steadily sat with this ANGER.

## SOMETHING ELSE SHOWS UP

Now something else comes: a voice with a worried, hand-wringing quality to it. It says, “You know, you really shouldn’t get so angry. You’ll hurt his feelings—he can’t help what he feels.”

A response comes: “And. I. Don’t. Care. I’m ANGRY.”

“You know, if you get *too* angry, you might have to leave and then you’ll be all alone . . .” “And. I. Don’t. Care. I’m ANGRY.”

I don’t know how long this inner conversation went on—something in me had this feeling that bad things would happen to me if I allowed myself to feel this ANGER. And the response from the angry place was always the same. “And. I. Don’t. Care. I’m ANGRY.”

Finally, the hand-wringing voice came up with what I knew was its last-ditch effort—the worst possible thing it could think of that would without doubt happen if I kept feeling this ANGER (although I cannot fathom at this point in my life why this felt *so* terrible at the time): “If you don’t stop being angry, you’ll have to leave everyone you know and go home to your mother and live there for the rest of your life, and never, ever leave . . .”

At this point, there was a sense that quite soon now, if I kept allowing myself to FEEL this anger, I would hit bottom—whatever that might be.

The response came: “And. I. Don’t. Care. I’m ANGRY.”

And hit bottom I did.

### **TRANSFORMING, ALL BY ITSELF**

“Bottom” had both a feeling and an image to it of having fallen into an endless dark, inky, underground cavern, whose bottom was covered with a dark, inky underground sea, with a full, impossible moon above.

I had been reading a book by the Indian sage Sri Nisargadatta, and a phrase came to me from that book that described what I was now sensing with my whole being: “the dark silent sea of Love.”

“Hitting” was a sense of my bottom touching down ever so gently onto a 1/2 inch cushion of air, just above the Dark Sea of Love—and then beginning a slow, billowy upward ascent.

Up, up, up. A feeling came as if I were a feather floating upward on an impossibly soft, billowy wind. I continued floating up, up, up... I was allowing myself to be lifted by it.

### **I CARRY THE SITUATION DIFFERENTLY**

I don’t know how much time had passed—it could not be more than 20 minutes, if that. Nothing had changed in my actual marriage situation in that little bit of time! But I now related to it altogether differently.

My heart was completely filled with love. I now felt that if my husband and I ended up reuniting, it would be wonderful. And if we went on with the divorce, I still loved my husband and wanted him to be happy. And hey, wouldn’t it be wonderful to explore other relationships!

This experience continued to unfold over several weeks, or perhaps it was several months.

### **ALLOWING THINGS TO BE AS THEY ARE**

Sadness would come. I would experience the down, down, down sensation. I would wordlessly sense it in my body, this sad feeling, so soft and full, and at the same time with

a spaciousness all around. I knew that it was because my husband and I had decided to get divorced that this beautiful and delicious sadness was here.

Inevitably, there would come a point where the downward feeling would shift and a sensation of billowy soft rising would begin. It felt blissful. I enjoyed that, too!

During this time, these billowy soft downward and upward experiences alternated. I went to work, came home, ate, slept and enjoyed this fullness of feeling, this fullness of life.

Each episode would be a little less intense, a bit softer than the last, and would last not quite as long. At some point, it gradually evened out into a simple openness to the fullness of life.

Eventually, my “normal” way of being in the world reasserted itself to a large degree. Unconscious and half-conscious reflexes of shutting down of feeling occurred. However, I had now experienced a new possibility for a very different way of being in the world.

## THE SEARCH BEGINS

I knew that this blessing of an experience had come to me spontaneously because I had come to a point of extremity in my life that was deep and sharp enough to cut through my defenses against feeling.

I came to wish there was some way I could learn to allow myself to feel what was there just as it was, without my shutting-down reflexes kicking in—not just once every few decades when I reached a point of extremity!

It was nearly 30 years later that I came across *The Radical Acceptance of Everything*. And although my search may have gone underground in my psyche, I instantly recognized what I had been searching for through the decades as I read.

I had been searching for a way to learn how to “do” this fearless dropping down into the unknown with my experience, staying with it long enough for it to fully unfold.

At last, I had found it.

But it was that first experience of spontaneous Focusing that laid the groundwork for a deep, fearless knowing in my body that way down there, at the bottom of even the most intense and profound rage—as long as I can allow myself to stay with it, just as it is—lies that Dark Silent Sea of Love.

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