

A TRANSFORMATIVE FOCUSING SESSION: Birthing in the Presence of Technology

Zehorith Mitz

In April 1994 I gave birth to my first son in one of the local hospitals. The doctor claimed the umbilical cord was wrapped around my baby and wouldn't let him out, thus necessitating that a vacuum machine be used. We were both harmed to the extent that we needed to stay in the hospital for a week instead of 3 days. My baby's skull was deformed by the pressure of the vacuum machine, and I had many stitches that needed attending to as there was no time for a controlled incision.

When we left the hospital and for a long time after, I thought we were saved by the medical staff and technology. At that time I chose to write about my thoughts and feelings hoping to gain a sense of relief and a better understanding of the birthing process.

The following narrative is an excerpt of my journal—narrative one:

April 1994

“When I arrived in the birthing room of my local hospital, I was in an advanced stage of labor. At the last possible moment the anesthesiologist arrived and gave me an epidural injection. Minutes later I lost all sensations in the lower part of my body. All of a sudden I could no longer hear the monitor . . . Everything happened so fast, my husband called the medical staff; we were connected to a vacuum machine. I tried to continue pushing, and I did—the baby was out, but the umbilical cord was wrapped around his right shoulder. He was placed briefly on my stomach then was taken away quickly. I remained for hours in one of the rooms undergoing medical procedures.”

As time passed, the thoughts I had about us being saved by the medical staff and technology were accompanied by a growing bodily sense of unease, a troubling feeling that I had experienced before, a feeling which was similar to the bodily sense I had after I was involved in three car accidents, and after the death of my father.

Each time a friend was going through the process of birthing, even if all went well, a burning sense emerged as if I was in flames. I couldn't find a routine or daily activity to extinguish these flames, as they probably were related to my own process of giving birth.

The more I tried to make-sense-of and interpret what happened during the birth experience, the more frustrated I became. My flames were aggravating. It seemed that the effort of attending to my memories by posing questions to myself contributed to a dead-end feeling.

I found myself torn between believing in the idea that we were saved by the medical staff and technology, and an opposing dramatic physical unease that wouldn't let go inside of me. My whole being was in a struggle.

As I was under the influence of the socially constructed beliefs in the power of medicine, my thoughts justified the goal of ‘saving lives at all expenses’, but my body just wouldn’t accommodate these thoughts; *it* wanted to give voice to a different experience.

I was looking for a mode of existence that could ease this struggle of opposing forces. In choosing Focusing, which is interaction, I sensed that *something more* might be revealed.

The second narrative is an excerpt of a Focusing session:

August 2009

I'm listening with great intent to the sound of the monitor.

This sound is the only indication of my contractions and my child's pulse.

I'm breathing and trying to allow my child to come out.

I feel sadness coming up and with it the words “give-up” and then “eternity”.

Pain fills the right side of my chest and moves further up. From that point a line connects it to the right side of my uterus.

It's a severe power struggle.

I continue breathing so he can come out.

Slowly his head emerges.

I'm happy to see him.

I see my husband cutting the umbilical cord.

I feel joy, relief and some weakness.

The pain in my chest alters.

I greet Dor as he's lying on my stomach.

I note his fetus-like appearance.

I feel I know his presence as he looks at me. With this I feel an opening in my chest.

We are together but apart.

I experience the physical tear in my body mending.

Healing.

My tears flow.

Violence at the birth of life.¹

1 I'd like to thank Dr. A. Perlestein for her presence during this session

Through this Focusing session it felt like I was walking in a dried canyon, stepping on a familiar path, a path that should have been taken, while a stopped process of harmonious joint efforts of mother and fetus through the process of birthing was finally flowing again.

During that transformational Focusing session, I experienced a crucial shift that resolved the agony of my intensely divided mind and body. Finally my body had an opportunity to give voice to how the birthing of my son should have been—dynamic, emotional, painful, cooperative, joyously opening, violent, and ultimately healing. My body's revelation has helped me escape from an imprisoning narrative about the power of medicine into an affirming confidence in the complex harmony of the birth experience. My body's narrative freed me to live forward.

Zehorith Mitz was formerly a scientist, then an independent scholar. She studied Focusing with Dr. Atsmaout Perlstein, as well as with Ruth Hirsch in Israel.

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