

THE LIGHT THAT FOCUSING FOUND

Paula Nowick, Ed.D.

“And may I ask why you’ve come?” the counselor said softly.

“It’s my son...just seventeen and already deeply into drugs...nothing we say or do has any influence...I’m at my wit’s end. Just last night...”

Her soft voice interrupted, *“Maybe we could just slow this down a bit...so you can check and see...How is this for me? What is this really about...this ‘I’m at my wit’s end’...”*

“I could scream, SCREAM!” I nearly shouted.

“Ummm”, she gently mused...*“See which would scream loudest,”* she asked, *“your chest or your gut?”*

I was caught off guard. I was about to tell her about the police call last night, and now I had to drop that and search around my inner organs to imagine which one would be the most hysterical. The request was so ludicrous that I might have challenged it except that a concerned friend had highly recommended this healing process called Biospiritual Focusing. I was desperate enough to give anything a try, even looking for screaming innards!

It took me some time to refocus my attention from the outside world to the invisible inner one. Well, my heart really hurt—like it was broken in two—but it seemed to want to sob, not scream. And my stomach? It was churning, but no scream. Then I felt it—in my intestines, in my whole lower abdomen, a sharp pain that wanted to explode. *“My gut wants to scream!”* I answered with some surprise.

“Would there be some words...or images...that would best describe that gut-that-wants-to-scream sense?”

Again I was caught off guard with no ready words. *“What?”* I stammered.

“If your gut could tell you what it’s going through...see what it might want to say...? Or if it could show you a picture, what your sense is of what you might see?” she gently asked...

I refocused on the lower pain. *“Hmmm—maybe something down there seems like flares on a dark sun...big, hot bursts that look really powerful, but then they just melt back down into the surface and do nothing but seethe...they basically are useless.... help-less.... and they are screaming, ‘STOP THAT NOW!!!’ but no one listens.”*

Calmly, the counselor responded, *“So see if you are able to stay by the side of all that pain and bursting flares...and maybe keep them company...as you might sitting with a friend who is going through a whole lot...just sitting there...knowing that you’re not able*

to do much to change her situation, but you are able to gently listen. Maybe...see if you can you do that...

I checked. Could I remain at the side of my awful gut-pain and just watch and listen with gentle curiosity? I wasn't sure. My habits were to ignore nervous butterflies or scold them for interfering with my plans, or maybe to distract myself by eating or turning on the TV. Most of all, I'd discount them by saying to myself, "Come on, now. It's not THAT bad. Others have it worse..."

"I'll try," I said to her.

"Good," she said. *"And maybe see...if the screaming flares would like to tell you more..."*

And more they did tell me! As I kept my attention on the wrenching twists in my gut, a memory arose of me tearfully pleading... which was met by his earnest promise to reform, followed by his stealing our checkbook a day later to buy more drugs. Prompted by the counselor, I paused right there, and just waited...this time with even more gentleness...because I was realizing for the first time how excruciatingly hard it had been then for my body to experience these roiling emotions of betrayal/anger/frustration/fear—and love. I continued to just wait silently.

"I don't know what to do next!"

"You're completely out of ideas..." she said thoughtfully, and then asked me to repeat that sentence again to the flaring pain.

"I'm empty. I've tried everything I could think of and now I'm completely...completely out of ideas," I whispered to the flaring pain in my gut. *"There's just...blankness."* It seemed as though my body was crumpling into spineless blob of oblivion. I was shrinking, dissolving, helpless. At first I was terrified, but then...

Very, very slowly, I became aware of how comforting this blankness was...it was sort of a vague downy comforter that I could sink into and be held, warmly, securely. And at that, I felt a gradual release of tension throughout my body, as though I no longer had to fight against how deeply grieving and exhausted I truly felt. For here, in my gut, was the simple, stark truth: I was helpless against his addiction.

You might suppose I sank into even greater despair at this insight, but just the opposite happened; my spirit was lifted! Huge waves of relief poured through me as I was released from the burden of thinking it was my parental duty to save him and that he was doomed without my help.

As I sat with this radical idea, I remembered hearing someone say that each of us is here to save our *own* soul—and that is a full-time job in itself. Now, that saying wasn't just interesting—it was real and true and alive inside of me. I waited—suspended in the enormity of the changes flowing through me.

Then suddenly, I whispered to the therapist, *"The light! The light!"*

I saw, I felt, I experienced what might best be described as a scintillating glow through my entire being—a light or lightness that fit exquisitely into every cell of my body making me come more alive than I had ever felt. The light WAS me and I it. No separation. The utter naturalness of it . . . the essential rightness of it . . . the ever-present truth of it . . . always steadily there though ignored because of the dramas playing out in our stressful lives.

But the session was drawing to a close, and I heard the counselor suggest that I allow that light to be as full as it wanted to be and to let it remain as long as it wished to stay. And, with that invitation, the light stayed dazzlingly bright for a few more seconds and then began to slowly withdraw—but not entirely disappear. Its intensity dimmed, but its memory implanted an indelible body-sense of profound joyfulness that still buoys me through storms and fair weather.

My son struggled with his addiction for the next twenty-three years. The weight of all this was immense—but not crushing.

For deep within me remains an indelible sense of a lightness that now and again, unbidden, sweeps over my despairing heart and chants with Julian of Norwich, “All is well, all is well, and in all manner of things, all is well.” And despite all present evidence to the contrary, I find myself saying, “Amen!” It is a level of comprehension that springs not from faith, not from logic, but from a mystical Focusing experience from my body.

At forty, sitting in his jail cell, my son had his own transformative experience. One night he felt a particularly intense combination of despair and disgust that gave rise to this sentence, “I am sick and tired of this life.” He said it over and over, amazed how those commonplace words reverberated so deeply with the truth of who he was right then. And that was it! He knew in his heart that something seismic had rocked his world, and he prayed to his higher power to make him willing to do whatever he needed to do to lead a clean life.

As of this writing, he has been clean for four years, has graduated with honors from a community college, and is profitably employed. It is a miracle. He is a miracle (and so am I, and so are you.) Unlike me, my son did not use Focusing to find serenity and joy. Focusing is only one of many paths to discovering what is calling us forward, and we honor them all, of course. But for me, Focusing is my most treasured, unfailing, and ever-fascinating path.

Focusing, after all, showed me the light.

Paula Nowick, Ed.D. now retired from teaching, has taught everything from dividing fractions (6th grade) to dangling participles (high school English) to The Inferno (college sophomores—including the entire football team!) to chaos theory (graduate seminar in Imagery and Creativity). She has also (along the way) worked for the U.S. Embassy in Paris and Teheran, been a newspaper reporter for two city newspapers, been the principal of a middle school, and administered the honors program at a community college, and (by the way) co-edits this Folio!

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