

LONGINGS OVER THE YEARS: Evolving Focusing Moments

Atsmaout Perlstein, Ph.D.

You are going to read about two stories around my felt sense and experiences of longing: the first one is about a longing to return back home to Israel after 30 years of living in Chicago. The second story, which takes place several years later, is still about the felt sense of longing, but this time, a longing to know the meaning of my life. In both stories I, the Focuser, was supported and invited to be with my inner experiences with no fear—just allowing the process be contained and have a safe space to unfold.

I have experienced the power of Focusing as both a guide to practical life changing decisions and then, later, as a transformative opening to a deep spiritual healing.

FIRST STORY—LONGING TO RETURN HOME AFTER 30 YEARS

I want to share with you an important life changing story and how my felt senses and various images became the grounds to keep my dream alive until the dream to return home came true.

I moved from Israel to Chicago to study psychology at age 20. Married, with a one-and-a-half year old boy, I planned to go back home after five years. I wanted to just finish my M.A degree in psychology, but when I was accepted to a doctoral program in clinical psychology, my return home was postponed. It was from this point forward that I unconsciously tucked away my wish and longing to-go-home deep inside of me. These were beautiful years full of the joys of raising children, traveling with friends, and professional development. I had a full life and going back home became a distant dream as I started my private practice. With my family, I stayed in Chicago for 30 years raising 3 more children.

In 1991, I was introduced to Focusing and learned how to do the process both on my own and in partnership. From early on, I benefited from Focusing because I was naturally able to identify my bodily felt senses in different situations, events and interactions. I learned to observe my experiences without judging them. Instead, I listened carefully to the meaning and the story they were trying to convey to me concerning my life.

Focusing in partnership helped me to contact my quiet, silent, and hidden feeling of longing to go back home. During the week I was busy at work and being a mother, but on Friday nights I Focused on my longing feeling inviting *it* to be present when I did the prayer over the Shabbat candles. It was a prayer without words, just being with the unfulfilled longing and wishing it would materialize when it was the right time for me.

Finally, an important shift happened in 1997 when I participated in the celebration of the Independence Day of Israel in downtown Chicago. The big hall was filled with Israelis

of all ages. The crowd sang along with the singers with a backdrop of multimedia videos and photos from Israel. I was flooded with childhood memories of smells, places and holidays with my extended family members. I was exhilarated and my felt sense of longing to go home broke loose. My whole being was resonating and vibrating to the songs and dances. From then on returning home became a goal that I spoke about openly to friends, my husband and family members.

My friends responded negatively to my plan: “You do not have a job in Israel. It would not work anyway, life is difficult in Israel.” My mother would shake her head and say, “It will not work out so why do you want to go through with it?”

Then I would feel doubts followed by a felt sense of pressure in my chest area with difficulty breathing. Thoughts would come in: “Maybe I am wrong, maybe they know better than me, maybe my longing to go back is childish and unreal.” During these difficult periods I would ask my long-time Focusing partner to sit with and listen to me.

FOCUSING SESSION #1: LONGING AT A PRACTICAL LEVEL

Listener: *Take some time to sit with the pressure in your chest...and maybe sense it from inside...take your time...*

Me: (after a long pause...) *the pressure is getting very intense...*

Listener: *It's feeling very intense...*

Me: *Yes, yes, I'm right here with it...(many seconds pass) it's beginning to back off...and now it's kind of stopping and even subsiding. I can breathe better now...I'm getting an image of a little girl sitting in the middle of my chest area who is feeling rejected and helpless.*

(I became silent again, realizing how intensely my body reacts to critical voices.) *I know this little sad girl from my childhood...and I don't want those old childhood feelings of helplessness to interfere with this grown-up life decision.*

Listener: *Take as much time as you need...to sense there...*

Me: (I sat quietly for a long time, inwardly watching the slowly changing sensations in my belly and chest)...*I am experiencing a deep, deep silence that words cannot describe. It starts in my belly and expands upward and downward. The image is as if I am sitting safely and comfortably in the depths of the Ocean. There are no noises or voices...Only a deep calming silence.*

Listener: *See if you can sense...what the meaning is...of this whole experience for you?*

Me: *The silence is filling my whole being. There is a sense that everything is going to be okay...to go back. There are no more words to be said.*

Listener: *If it feels right...maybe check to see what would it be like...what it would mean...for you to go back home?*

Me: *I can feel now big tears of joy rolling down on my cheeks and in my solar plexus...I am feeling a new surge of energy and something is opening...The image that comes is an opening flower. It feels like my soul is opening up to the “more” of life...opening to my life in ways I do not know now. This opening of my soul is so powerful inside...my whole being is resonating as though every cell is opening to this “more of life”. (I stayed in this amazing sensation for quite awhile until it slowly began to fade.)*

Listener: *Maybe see how it would be for you...if you stayed here in Chicago for a life time?*

Me: (I was silent for awhile...and then I experienced my hands moving towards each other, closing in the space between them. The movement stopped just before the palms were clasped together.)...*Shrinking, everything is closing in and shrinking...My whole being would suffer this loss. I would pay a high price. (My body had given me the answer to my longing to return home.)*

From that time on, whenever in doubt, I would go straight to my belly and check deep inside and ask, “What is my belly’s felt sense regarding new doubts concerning going back home?”

It never failed to give me the sacred silence of the deep ocean, again and again. There was no change or doubt in the felt sense in my belly. In my subsequent Focusing sessions I would also challenge the hand movements regarding my return home. Again, the image and the hand movements did not fail. The body’s wisdom has always brought me the experience of energy flow in the solar plexus as a sign to return home to Israel.

I finally returned home to Israel in 2000 and have been living there for 12 years now. Since my arrival, I have experienced an amazing surge of energy to expand and gain momentum and move forward. My image of the soul opening up to new horizons since that day in 1997 has brought me to where I am. Home.

FOCUSING SESSION #2: LONGING AT A SPIRITUAL LEVEL

My partner and I sat facing each other in comfortable chairs as we have been doing for many years now. We know the routine of our meetings, talking a little about our week and then sitting quietly...one of us will start Focusing...it’s me...

Me: *Since my 63 rd birthday I have been exploring the meaning of my life. I think about it often and I would like to Focus on it.*

Listener: *So something is there for you about...the meaning of life...and you want to spend some time with it now...*

Me: *I’m finding two opposing body felt senses: One place in my chest area where I sense comfort...fullness...and nothing is missing. My life is full. The second place where I experience the question of the meaning of my life is in the pit of my stomach. Deep in there I sense a voice calling the word “longing.” It has a special tone and quality and is not painful at all...and it has a movement like it is rolling and swirling trying to reach the outside.*

It is a “longing” with energy...energy that is powerful and wants to move forward into something.

Listener: *It seems like you have two different experiences in two different places in your body...In your chest area you experience comfort and fullness...and in the pit of your stomach you hear out loud the word “longing” that is rolling and pushing outward from inside you...*

Me: *I can really feel this energy right here. (I was pointing with my hands to the center of my body. The energy is “longing” to roll outside.)*

Listener: *The energy is right there*

Me: *An image just came. I see myself being in a forest...getting up in the morning, smelling the trees, and listening to the birds chirping...*

Listener: *There’s a wonderful image there...the smelling of the trees...hearing the birds chirping...*

Me: *Yes...the image and the feeling is wonderful...and...there is also the longing...*

Listener: *I am inviting you to just take a moment to stay with your first inner experience of longing before you go into the image of the forest that followed it. Just see whether or not the “longing” experience unfolds inside you if you give it the space. Do not rush yourself.*

Me: (My listener’s invitation to return to the longing is a special surprise to me. Nevertheless, when I checked it inside, it felt right. So, I bring my attention to the center of my body where the experience of “longing” is present. I am aware of a deep silence that is spreading into my stomach and my womb. These areas feel full—too full.)

And now I’m experiencing a big shift inside. I’m feeling the energy from the pit of my stomach that was pushing to get outside. It is now turning full circle and is filling me up...I can feel a deep silence coming upon me...I already know this quality of deep silence from my experience of longing to go back home when I lived in Chicago. Then, it was the silence like in the deep ocean.

Listener: *Take as much time as you need to sit with the silence...*

Me: *I am experiencing silence within and without. Right now I have no sense of my physical body...I feel one with the surroundings. I can sense a quiet breathing happening, a strange sense of a mouth talking rather than me talking. There is a sense that the spoken words and sentences are hanging in a space of nothingness...*

Deeper and deeper the silence continues. I sense an expansion of my consciousness experiencing vastness that contains everything...it’s like being in a flow with no interruptions.

Listener: *A vastness...like being in a flow with no interruptions...*

Me: *Yes...I am now in my safe place just like the one I encountered in Chicago. But this place is “more”...I experience total peace and harmony here...I experience the emptiness that is full...I am floating in space in the dark space between the stars...The silence and*

the darkness envelope me. I am safe with no fears...I feel a total sense of freedom. I can totally let go...

Listener: *You know this place.....you feel safe...and free...you can totally let go here...*

Me: (I hear my partner's voice out there in space. I feel like it's time to return to the room. I feel transformed and rejuvenated. I come back into the room, to the chair to my body. I am taking the time to open my eyes and look at my partner. The ability of my listener to bring me back to the original inner experience, rather than running off with the image is what offered me the opportunity to open the door to the spirit. For me as a veteran Focuser that was the big surprise in this session. My tears of gratitude at the end of the session were for the listener who made the "pause" for me at this place which enabled me to experience my unique safe place in the universe.)

THE FRUITS OF THIS TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE

The feeling of longing has been powerful in my life, and Focusing with this feeling, shared in partnership, brought to me the gift of the silence in the deep ocean and the deep, safe silence of expanded consciousness in space.

The dark, empty, safe place that I experienced in space has become useful when I need to rejuvenate my body at times of tiredness and exhaustion. At these special times I lie on my back, I take about 10 conscious breaths and then invite myself to enter the dark safe space and let go all my tensions and tiredness. It feels like I enter a special space where my body is most relaxed and free from doubts, critical voices, thoughts and emotions. In this state of mind I experience rejuvenation and healing. My longings have brought me contentment and joy.

Dr. Atsmaout Perlstein is a Focusing Oriented clinical psychologist with a private practice treating individuals, couples and families in Tel Aviv, Israel. She is a coordinator who co-founded the Israeli Focusing Center that has been active in training professional and others in Focusing. She can be reached at: Cell: 972 523-944244

Email: atsmaout@gmail.com

Website: www.focusingisrael.co.il