

IN-LIGHTENMENT

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I have seen the light . . . This was such a revolutionary idea and experience that I have jumped at the opportunity that the editors have presented me with, and I am relishing the chance to relive the session with my WholeBody Focusing partner, as I share it with the reader.

First I would like to give you some background of the aspects of my life that are relevant to the *aha* Focusing experience that I am going to tell you about.

RELIGION

When I was growing up, I went to Sunday school and church regularly. My impression looking back on those days is that this was largely a social activity. The most important aspect was that we were well dressed including gloves and hats, and the talk was always about clothes that people were wearing, and who was sitting where. During the sermon my father who was a church warden would go to sleep and there would be the crackle of the sweet wrappers and whispered conversations. When I was around sixteen, my parents suddenly announced that they weren't going to church anymore, as the people running the church were not Christian. No other explanation was given. From then on we only attended church for rite of passage occasions such as christenings, weddings and funerals. My mother is virulently anti organised religion and regards it as a crutch for people who can't manage life otherwise. And she told me that the Bible is simply a historical document full of nice stories. As a result of this upbringing, I have no sense of a religious belief or inclination, and in fact I have an aversion to religious vocabulary and have struggled to find a way of contacting a sense of being connected to the universe or something larger than myself. However, as I have grown older, finding such a connection has become more important, and, while I believe in it intellectually, I have yearned for a physical and spiritual relationship.

BODIES

In my family of origin, bodies had two uses. Firstly, they were to carry our clothes. I was one of three girls, and along with our mother, we all sewed our own clothes and were avid fashion devotees. As I mentioned before, the trip to church each week was preceded by great activity of clothes preparation and shopping. We had a wonderful collection of hats, in which we took great pride, and even my father loved shoes. Secondly, our bodies carried our heads to school, etc. Our intellectual activities were very important. School achievement was of paramount importance, and being sharp and witty was seriously valued. We did not do sports other than the necessary Phys. Ed. at school, which was dreaded. Our knowledge of

physiology and anatomy was very limited, and never were we taught to treat our bodies with respect. Touch was limited, and physical displays of affection were unacceptable. Furthermore, emotions which are the reactions of the body to stimuli, were to be kept strictly under control and private. It is this last aspect that has been the most difficult for me. Keeping my emotions under wraps has resulted in periodic outbursts when the effort to control them has been too much, and it is for that reason that I have found Focusing of benefit.

Why do I tell you all this? I want to give you an idea of where I began my life and the impact that Focusing and Wholebody Focusing have had on me, and in particular the impact of the session that I describe here. I had no spiritual sense, but longed to find one. I had no sense of my body other than when it hurt. Thus connecting the two with Wholebody Focusing has been nothing short of revolutionary.

FOCUSING

I found Focusing with the help of Nada Lou. From the beginning I had the sense that I had been looking for this (the Focusing process) all my life, and I found the structure of the six steps a wonderful way to access my emotions on a visceral level. I remember in our first session I was able to identify very quickly where the felt sense was in my body, and to give it attention and possibly a voice was such a relief. I began to work with Nada Lou shortly after the death of my daughter, and our sessions together helped me get in touch with the mixed feelings that I was carrying concerning her death. I particularly remember one session in which I could really take in the image of a firefly, and with that word accept the temporariness of my daughter's life here with us. It was a beautiful image that gave me peace. I enjoy the *pause* that is part of Focusing and clearing the space as I ask what is going on for me today. The process has also given me a contact with my body and its wisdom and liberated me from the necessity of keeping my emotions under wraps. My feelings know that there will be a time put aside in which they will be listened to and feel heard.

WHOLEBODY FOCUSING

Kevin McEvenue has integrated aspects of the Alexander Technique with Focusing to create WholeBody Focusing. I, too, am an Alexander Technique teacher. For me the combination really speaks to who I am. Alexander work is about liberating us from holding patterns and letting the real body shine through, and this liberation allows us to move through our habits, both physical, mental and spiritual, to be truly who we are. In Wholebody Focusing we address, as the name suggests, the whole body. Each session begins with an attunement beginning with grounding. I start at my feet sensing the floor and below the floor into the ground and below the ground into the centre of the Earth. Gradually I bring my body into contact with this sense of the ground slowly moving upwards. I “watch” as each part of me greets and contacts the part below and then I move upwards until I reach the top of my head. At that point I connect with the space above me and I take in the environment around me. Thus I am in contact with the ground, the space above, and I expand into the sur-

rounding space. All of this gives me time to pause and slow down and connect with myself. We call this Grounded Presence.

What I noticed as I became more familiar with this process, was that all of my senses heightened in awareness. The first sense that I noticed was my sense of sight. The clarity, definition and depth became more so. The colours were brighter and the shadows deeper. Then I noticed that I heard more. The birds, the wind, the leaves “talked” to me, and music moved me in a way that I hadn’t noticed before. Sight and hearing were followed by taste and touch and smell, and finally I realised that my kinesthetic sense, that sense of oneself, where we are, how we are and how we are moving, became more acute. For someone who had not known her body as a child, this was sometimes overwhelming and brings tears to my eyes to remember.

HEART FELT CONVERSATIONS

As part of the WholeBody Focusing training we have been introduced to Heart Felt Conversations. Both partners are in Grounded Presence. When we are in a session, we choose whether we are going to begin with an agreed topic, or one of us suggests something we would like to talk about, or we wait and see what comes up. Both of us are speaking from our Grounded Presence, and as one speaks, the listener notices what comes up for him/her and then shares. Both partners are both listeners and Focusers, and as the name suggests, we are sharing from a heart-felt awareness. The closeness of these “conversations” is extraordinary, and I am often struck by the sense of being privileged to be sharing in this manner. We are feeling so safe in this partnership that we are willing to share our truths.

My partner in Heart Felt Conversations brings to me a spiritual dimension which I really appreciate as I do not have a clear idea of something larger than myself, God or the Universe.

On this particular occasion, a phone session together, we were able to achieve what we defined as a level of Heart Felt Conversation that took us into another dimension in which all our senses were clearer and brighter, including our felt sense and kinesthetic sense. We take time to ground, to take in a sense of other, and to “clear a space”, Focusing on what is present to us right now.

I become aware of wondering if some Heart Felt Conversations are more heartfelt than others, so we explored what ‘heartfelt’ means . . . “It’s about pausing, being still, checking inside” . . . “It’s as though we can feel the breeze between us” . . . “It’s an awareness of self as synonym for Heart Felt” . . . “It’s only possible if you pause and check in” . . . “It’s also what you sense when you DO that . . .”

While we are talking I am looking out at the lake, and I can see a buoy bobbing in the wake of a boat, and it brings to mind the way in which we remain afloat when we are listening to someone who is experiencing a strong emotion. So I share the idea that we are able to stay grounded and whole as the emotion flows over us as if we are the buoy bobbing in the water. My partner picks up the image and confirms yes, this is how to stay grounded

and in place when the wake is an overwhelming emotion of the other person. We can watch the buoy on the edge of the lake. The waves are going by it, but IT stays in place . . . it's not going anywhere. My partner shares that she can feel it in the center of her body. It's not taking energy to be there . . . keeping an image of the buoy in the lake, the waves do go around it, it really is grounded. I too can sense the solidity, the groundedness that enables me to be like the buoy that is attached to the bottom of the lake so it isn't moved by the wake.

My partner feels this image will be helpful when she meets a woman she finds difficult at the spiritual retreat the next week. And for her what came next is the idea that "something beyond me, beyond chair, floor, gravity, gives me my spiritual grounding . . . for me, it's my connection to the universe."

I then share that for me there is a connection between our senses and groundedness, and when we are grounded, all of our senses get heightened, to see, taste, touch and feel (felt senses). Together we wondered "WHY is it heightened when I'm in this space?" My partner realises that it is as if the cobwebs get cleared away, the mist rises. We share that when we are in Grounded Presence, we take up a different volume . . . we have a different quality . . . are we being transformed . . . yes!

At this point we are both marvelling at where we are going in our Heart Felt Connection. The connection is such that we hardly need to speak as we explore this extraordinary awareness together. Fortunately my partner has a better understanding of what 'Spiritual' entails, so she is able to voice the idea that comes to her next: "*Something spiritual comes to us through the senses!!*" Wow!! What an idea, that spiritual comes through the senses!!

I then ask, "What if this was simple?" Together we come to the next realisation . . . "The body is activated" . . . "Everything it can do, it's able to do better . . . in a kind of unison or integration." "This is the whole in Wholebody Focusing".

We savour this together, and then she adds, "We are doing this with our minds. It's our way of thinking about it that is creating this unison." Her comment moves me to say, "Perhaps it is the whole body that is 'doing' it, and our mind is a partner that is putting some words to the whole experience . . . choosing the most resonant words, understanding that it can never say all of it." In fact, we feel the energy of what our partner is NOT saying . . . not because it's being withheld, but because it's there to be sensed. We stop and take this all in, and the idea comes forth in me, "I can kind of feel what you're NOT saying . . . I hear your words and let them drape over me."

As we both checked in with our Grounded Presence, we shared that we were feeling as though we were "two spirits walking through the woods." For me this was so delicious I wanted to pause and take this all in. I was afraid that I would be overwhelmed by any additional ideas. Already there were tears in my eyes and a welling of feeling in my heart.

The question came from my partner, "How does one recreate it when the going gets tough?" We really take time to reflect on how this Heart Felt Conversation was for each of us today. We agreed that the quality of heartfelt-ness that we had achieved in our session was amazing. We had gone to a level that is not available to everybody. With a laugh of delight

we agreed that someday, when we're far more advanced, we will be Celestial Angels!! This moment felt like enlightenment or more accurately "in-lightenment".

I got off the phone flabbergasted at what I had discovered—that this sense that I'd had of being connected was 'spiritual'. Something spiritual comes to us through the senses!! This sense that the birds were talking to me, the leaves waving at me, the trees supporting me was spiritual, blew me away. It was as if a bolt of lightning had hit me, followed by the roar of thunder directly overhead. This realization was life changing, and I am grateful for having had this experience with my partner who could name what we had experienced together. Ironically it is through the relationship with my body that I have found what I have been looking for, a relationship with something bigger than me, a spiritual awareness of the Universe.

THE EFFECT ON MY LIFE

There are two aspects to the effect that this experience has had on my life: one concerns the nature of the "conversation" that made the experience possible and the other concerns the personal impact that this new insight about spirituality has had on my life.

First, how was it that we were able to have such a "conversation" without being physically present to one another? How was this different from a regular conversation? Of primary importance, was the fact that we were in Grounded Presence and that we consciously stayed in Grounded Presence throughout our conversation. Just as water can flow in a river when the ice blocks have melted, no longer held back by the ice, and the water can once more rush onwards to the expansiveness of the sea.

By being in Grounded Presence, we were totally connected with ourselves and with our environment in an expanded way. As an Alexander Technique teacher, I regard this way of being as removing all the blockages to the flow of energy within our bodies, and when we are able to do this, we are free to move, to relate, and to engage. This also enables us to be one with our environment where the boundaries between us and our surroundings melt so we are more available and open. Picture a balloon in which the rubber has become more porous so air can go in and out, and thus it can float. Thus our sphere of influence becomes greater.

So when we partners come together, our spheres of influence can overlap and blend. We are separate and one at the same time. Thoughts are energy, and within this blended influence there is no resistance to energy. Quite the contrary, the energy flow is encouraged. As we talked, we became very excited by the energy flowing as the thoughts came quicker and clearer, and words hardly had to be spoken as the energy went back and forth. Within the "conversation" there is trust, acknowledgement, encouragement and acceptance. This is all due to our mutual Grounded Presence and such conversations are so exhilarating!!

I am grateful that I have been able to have this "heartfelt conversation" with my partner. My partner's spiritual life is a part of her sphere of influence, and as our spheres connected under Grounded Presence, I could allow the overlap of our spheres and let it in.

Needless to say, for me the fact that I discovered that I can now access this spirituality for myself has given me enormous comfort. When I take my daily walks, I am one with my surroundings. I experience the presence of the birds, squirrels and chipmunks, the ducks and the loons as if they were my friends and even an extension of myself. Even the clouds above are part of me. I am no longer alone. I have support from the world around me. I am grateful for the new way of being.

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