

## HEALING THROUGH NEW WORLD MEDITATION

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Here is the story of New World Meditation (NWM), the practice that David and I developed by meditating together, Focusing together, and talking endlessly about what was happening. It took root when I started meditating in graduate school more than 30 years ago. Now, through years of practice it has evolved, and we have given it words.

New World Meditation is a merging of Mindfulness and Focusing. Mindfulness is primarily a self-reflective process, simply sitting and watching the mind. Focusing, on the other hand, is a proactive way of self-inquiry that relies on the bodily carried knowing. In New World Meditation the two processes come together to make a powerful tool for emotional healing.

There are two main reasons why this *crossing* works so well. The tools of Focusing help the meditator to make sense of and heal the wounds of the past, which keep coming up in daily practice. The Focuser learns the importance and gains the benefit of daily practice, which accelerates healing by increasing the intensity of our experience of our wounds. Thus we can't ignore their demands for healing and resolution. Self-forgiveness comes with healing, bringing the end of suffering and the wisdom of compassion.

Because I was a seeker on the path, I was blessed to learn both Focusing and meditation at almost the same time in my life. In my graduate training I worked with two professors who had studied with Gene Gendlin, and each had a powerful influence on my life. I studied Focusing as part of a two-year course in Client-Centered Therapy taught by Joe Noel, and I was introduced to Mindfulness practice and encouraged to explore Buddhism by Linda Olsen Weber. When I began learning Focusing with Joe Noel, I was instinctively drawn to it. I took to Focusing immediately and very naturally. I intuitively understood the importance of *bodily carried felt meaning*. I loved the scientific, research-based model that Focusing was rooted in. Linda gently brought Focusing and body work together with an inherent understanding of the role of the body in emotional healing and growth.

When I think of these two wonderful people, I still feel my heart open with gratitude for the gifts that I received from each of them. Later I went to Chicago and met with Gene and Mary McGuire for seminars and a few individual sessions with Gene. Focusing has been an amazing life-changing feast for my deepest self, my soul, as well as my mind and heart.

At the California School of Professional Psychology (CSPP) competition was very intense. Even getting into the school was notoriously difficult. I was proud, and scared, but mostly excited by the wide diversity of thought and teaching that I found there. When I started at CSPP in 1973, I was aware that I needed some way of coping with the anxiety and stress that I was experiencing. I decided to try meditation even before I started school. I was fascinated by the idea that it might bring me to a higher level of consciousness as well as calming me down.

All my life I had been under stress because of the dysfunctional family that I grew up in. I carried a deep sense of anxiety that came out of living in the chaos of an alcoholic home. I have come to understand, through my own therapy and the healing process of New World Meditation, corroborated by my study of today's neuroscience, that this anxiety was hard-wired into the core of my operating system from childhood trauma. Early trauma affects the synaptic patterns in the developing brain of the child in ways that are very difficult to change in later life.

It was a time of major transition for me. I was recently divorced, and a single mother with two small children. There was far more to do than there were hours in the day. Like so many children of alcoholic parents, I needed to feel a sense of control. Starting early every morning I cleaned the house as fast as I could, running from task to task. I was creating this stress as a way of containing my anxiety. I couldn't tolerate leaving a bed unmade or unwashed dishes in the sink. I would race off to school, driving across town in heavy traffic with my heart racing. One morning in the car I had a flash of insight. I realized that it was more important to put myself together than to put the house together, I needed my quiet time of reflecting and relaxing more than I needed to have the beds made.

This insight was a turning point for me. I began to make meditation a priority. I gave myself permission to sit in silence, going within, every morning before facing the intensity of the day. From the beginning I felt more relaxed. Meditation reduced my anxiety and gave me a serene refuge, a home base in my busy life. Regular meditation meant I had to get up long before my children, which wasn't easy. But the daily process was very rewarding from the start. I reached moments of ecstatic bliss even in the early months of my practice. My meditation quickly became a treat to look forward to. There were mornings when I had to choose between eating and meditating, and I chose to meditate—which I found to be the most satisfying way to spend the small amount of time reserved for me.

Without thinking much about what I was doing, I naturally used Focusing as an integral part of my meditation. Looking back, I do remember thinking that I didn't have time to Focus and meditate every morning, so I would notice what I was feeling in my body and sit with it in meditation. I was using the skills of Clearing a Space, as well as felt sensing, as part of my meditation. I knew enough about meditation to know that interruptions and thoughts were an inevitable part of the process, but traditional Mindfulness didn't show me how to cope with them. With Clearing a Space I was able to gently acknowledge and put aside many of the thoughts that came up. When certain thoughts emerged that were loaded with feeling, I flowed into felt sensing and spent more time with them. I wasn't consciously aware of exactly how I was merging them. For years I thought of my "meditation" as a single undifferentiated process.

When I met David 13 years ago, I immediately started talking about Focusing, what it meant to me and how valuable I felt it was. We started practicing Focusing together, and he began reading Gendlin's work. After a while I began inviting him to meditate with me each morning. At first he said he wasn't interested, since he had Focusing. He would go off to read the paper while I sat meditating. Finally, after months, one morning he decided to try it. Then he wanted to know what to do with all the interruptions, the seemingly endless stream of thoughts. Up until then I was teaching him only what I thought of as "meditation". As we continued to sit together, I realized I was doing something far different than traditional

Mindfulness, and not the same as Focusing. In order to teach him, I had to clearly define this new process.

David and I began the long discussions, the slow process of analyzing what was going on, and teasing out the ways that Focusing was working for us in meditation. I began to spend part of my meditation time in deep contemplation, feeling my way into the process itself. It took time, but gradually I started to see how I was weaving the two practices together. As I worked with David and continued my own inner work, I came to appreciate the healing power of this new daily practice.

In 2005 we felt that there were enough well-trained focusing people in the area that we could invite them to come to our home for a gathering and possibly form a Changes group. Fifteen people showed up for that first meeting. We were delighted. All of them were interested in having a Changes group, a place where we could come on a monthly basis. We invited the group to meet at our home each month for an entire Saturday. We spent the mornings in Focusing pairs, and then ate lunch together—where we had fascinating conversations. After lunch we had open discussions, Focusing-oriented-discussions as Beverly Shoenberger called them, emphasizing felt sensing during our interaction. Sometimes we did round-robins, quick Focusing sessions of five or ten minutes, going from pair to pair around the circle. This group became our family of choice. It was so precious to us, truly a wonderful gift.

When we left Los Angeles to move to Costa Rica, we had to leave the group behind. We comforted ourselves knowing that we were moving to Costa Rica for a more peaceful relaxed and quiet life, where we didn't have to work full time and could have the adventure of living abroad. In Costa Rica we found limited resources for Focusing. The Focusing group here was trained in Domain Focusing, and we found that we were like fish out of water. We were not comfortable making a mental decision about what to work on, and we were used to beginning with our body experience in-the-moment. The group was very small, and new people kept coming in all the time. We understood that there was a need to expand the Focusing community here by bringing in these new people, but on a personal level it wasn't right for us.

We wanted to go deeper, as we could only do in a stable group of skilled and experienced focusers who could handle the deep waters. To fill this void we started thinking more profoundly about our daily practice. We lived in a beautiful tree top apartment, where bird songs were the only sound of the morning. It was perfect for meditation. Also, we had the time to think more deeply about Focusing and meditation and how they work together. I began struggling to write down my reflections so I could teach them to others who are deeply in need of healing.

In order to help you understand how David and I have worked this process, we will each share some of our healing story, as well as our thoughts about the process. Obviously there is not sufficient space here for us to tell you everything that occurred, so we have each picked a few short stories and personal reflections in order to give you the *feeling* of how this crossing worked for us.

As you read along you will see that the process evolves into a dialogue between us, about our lives with NWM and Focusing. And so we begin with some very personal stories.

## David

I always tried to figure out what was going on in the family, and with my own feelings. I would spend time thinking, trying to understand the different motivations that were driving my mother, stepfather, father and stepmother. At first, of course, I thought everything that went on in the family was my fault. But one day I realized that everybody had his or her own agenda, and it wasn't about me, at all. I was just a pawn that they were using to meet their own needs, and act out their anger at each other. I felt very much alone and isolated in the family drama.

First, I will share with you a little background. My parents divorced when I was two years old. My mother remarried a Mormon attorney when I was six. They were happy together and began having babies right away. I have five half brothers and sisters. I was always very responsible, and my mother leaned on me for support in dealing with all the children. I never got to be a child myself; I was always treated like an adult, and I was expected to meet adult expectations. I was mother's helper, taking far too much responsibility.

I was dyslexic as a child. I didn't learn to read until I was in eleventh grade. In those days very little was known, and even less was understood, about dyslexia and learning disabilities, so the teachers and my parents thought I wasn't trying. I was scolded, put down and criticized for not applying myself, and I became an angry kid. Also I wasn't allowed to see my real father, whom I idealized, except for short stays on school vacations.

Into my adult life I continued trying to mentally figure out why I felt as I did and reacted the way I did in certain relationships. When I started learning Focusing, it was like a miracle in my life. I took to Focusing like a duck to water. In all my struggles it had never occurred to me to look into my body to discover my deeper needs and feelings. In Focusing I discovered a whole new world of bodily carried awareness.

## Lucinda

I'm happy to hear you say that. I find that simply sitting with *whatever comes* is so amazingly healing.

When I was a child my parents expected me to go to ballet school three times a week, starting when I was four years old. Of course I tried, and I did very well. But, there were many complications. We were often late. Mother was always in a hurry, she would drive me across town as fast as she could. Too many times we would get caught at the railroad crossing and find that the train was between us and the ballet studio. We had no choice but to wait. So when I arrived at the class I was late, I had to quickly scramble into my leotard, tights and shoes. All the other girls had already warmed up, and I had to figure out what was happening, and hurry to catch up. I hated that part. It was very competitive. Quite often mother would wait with the other mothers in the gallery. I could hear the whispered comments about all the girls, what they were wearing, who was doing it right and who was doing it wrong.

The worst part for me was waiting for mother to pick me up after class when she couldn't stay. I was scared, waiting in the back of that old building in Hollywood, getting cold and chilled as twilight set in, and feeling abandoned, sometimes wondering if she would

ever come. She always showed up, but sometimes I waited half an hour. Over time I came to resent going to class. It was clear to me that in order to be really good at ballet I would have to dedicate myself completely. I felt like I could never have a perfect technique, which of course was the goal. I felt like it was mother's choice rather than my own. My teacher said that if I was a great ballerina, I wouldn't notice that my feet were bleeding. Finally when I was a teenager I decided to quit. My parents were very disappointed. For years I resented having to go to ballet school. But now I see things in a different light.

One morning in meditation a vision came. I saw myself in ballet class struggling to catch up and keep up and be as good as the other girls. But this time I began to realize how much I benefited from this ballet experience. For my parents it was a gift they were giving me. That morning in meditation I saw that this ballet training was the reason I've always been so athletic; I've always loved dance of all kinds and appreciated the arts. Also I realize that ballet school taught me the value of self-discipline, and that insight was very empowering. Now, when I think of ballet school, I remember the fun part too, not just the hassle and the stress, and the too high expectations.

## David

I had a really big issue with betrayal in my life, especially in my relationship with my Father. In meditation, this theme of betrayal came up over and over again, loaded with hurt, grief, anger and pain. It was the terrible pain of losing what I thought was my Dad, that is, the Dad I thought he was, or dreamed he was. Over months and months of meditation on this theme, even earlier betrayals started to come to the surface. One that really touched me had to do with my good friend, David Pearson. When I was twelve or thirteen, I went to a Boy Scout meeting one evening, where I saw David. Something happened, I don't remember what it was...maybe his bike was damaged. Anyway, David accused me of damaging his bike. I didn't know anything about it, and I felt betrayed by him when he gathered the whole group of guys around him, and they all decided I that was to blame. When the meeting was adjourned, they came after me, running through the neighborhood. I was never very upset, because I knew the neighborhood well, and I lived on a golf course nearby. I was able to sneak across the golf course and get to my own house, and down into my basement bedroom. I calmed down and started doing my homework. Suddenly the outside entrance opened, and there was David leading the pack. In my meditation I saw the whole incident through new eyes. Suddenly I saw David not just as a friend who betrayed me, but as a kid who was simply trying to fit in with the rest of the guys. Gone was my anger resentment and hurt. I saw him just as I myself once was, only a kid feeling inadequate, and wanting so badly to be part of the group. This profound shift was made possible, I believe, by my many sessions of meditation on my Father's betrayal of me, and trying so hard to understand him.

What made this meditation profound was that my healing now enabled me to feel compassion more generally, for others who have hurt me in the past. This was the beginning of a big change for me. Now, in daily practice, I consciously endeavor to see anyone with whom I am in conflict in the light of their suffering. When I do this I come to compassion and return to love.

Gendlin says that when you have a *felt shift* a myriad of possibilities open, new ways of viewing events of the past in a different light. I love that! It's almost like now I see before

me a whole array of different viewpoints on many things that happened in my life—people who are important to me. It’s like every big shift opens layers and layers of insight into old events. For example, I remembered that incident with David over a year later in meditation after I had a profound Focusing session with Beverly and Lucinda concerning my Dad.

### **Lucinda**

It was wonderful watching you in that session. I saw the discomfort gripping your chest, and I felt admiration for you in your strength to stay with it as long as you did. I thought it was a great session, and I had the feeling that it was Beverly’s and my support that helped you.

I want to talk a little about felt sensing. I have an uneasiness in me when I think of how Focusing works with mindfulness in NWM. Most often, I don’t ask for a handle when a felt sense comes. Its meaning seems to come of its own accord, and I don’t usually have to ask. When something’s important, it just keeps coming back until I get the message. Somehow I feel like I am betraying Focusing when I don’t ask for a handle. But I find I really don’t need to. The felt sense might come back day-after-day or it might take time off for a week or two and then come back again, but when it comes with great intensity I sit with *it*. I don’t have to ask for the deeper meaning—the meaning just comes. I get that “aha, that’s it” feeling. I guess I rely on this *coming back to...* because I practice every day, so I always know it will be there tomorrow.

Ahhh.... Now I see that what I’m talking about here has a lot to do with the everydayness of it. Without the everyday practice, felt senses wouldn’t have this intensity, and they wouldn’t keep coming back. That’s the way it is with every day practice; I just rely on the fact that *it* will return when the time is right. If I can’t resolve the issue today, I know it will come back tomorrow or sometime soon.

### **David**

For me it’s sort of the same; felt senses emerge spontaneously. Things seem to come up in their own time over years of daily practice. There is a kind of gradual peeling away of the many layers of old stuff that I was already familiar with. But with Focusing and meditation I see my life in a different light. Things from my past came up spontaneously as though they were asking for new insight.

## **THE EVERYDAYNESS OF NEW WORLD MEDITATION**

### **Lucinda**

In New World Meditation, I very seldom get up in the morning and say, *I think I’ll work on this or that today*. When I sit to meditate, whatever wants to be known simply comes; it comes in my body with an intensity that demands attention. There is no mental decision involved. I find that I don’t need to ask for a felt sense; they most often just emerge when it is time. It’s like the felt sense comes when it is ready, when I am ready. I don’t need to ask for a handle. It simply comes when I stay present with the felt sense. And maybe, because I am so facile with Focusing, handle—the “what is this” part—comes so quickly and easily.

It seems I can't stay away from the felt sense. If I slip away from the essence, the felt sense will inevitably return when it wants to. It keeps coming back until I let go and allow myself to stay with the felt sense long enough for the crux of its meaning to emerge. Then, often it seems to need still more of this staying-with. And finally I come to a new place of recognition that feels like waking up. When I admit the truth, no matter how painful it is, I see what happened freshly with new eyes. There is a feeling of relief in my body.

## **WE HEAL IN LAYERS**

### **David**

Everything that has happened to us is stored inside in layers. It seems like every betrayal echoes every prior betrayal, so that resolving the current betrayal and coming to self-forgiveness and compassion allows me to see prior injuries in a new light. I feel the many layers gradually coming out. It's as if each one hides beneath the one before and can't come forth until the first one is resolved. By resolved, I mean, I get the message. I realize what happened, I grieve, and I come to peace—self-forgiveness, self-compassion, and return to love. Sometimes it has taken years for these layers to emerge one by one to be healed. I wonder if *staying-with* helps the hidden layers come out more quickly. For you, Lucinda, it seems to go faster.

### **Lucinda**

Maybe that's true. If it is true it's because I've been practicing for so long. The everydayness of meditation makes it very different from Focusing. Focusing is something we usually do whenever we have time, in time we carve out, or in time set aside to work with a partner. Most of us do not do Focusing every day. Meditation on the other hand is daily.

For me daily practice makes all the difference. Meditating every day is far more powerful than meditating once in a while because daily practice inevitably sorts out what is not important, leaving the more serious long-term feelings, issues, and problems. Over time the thoughts and feelings that emerge deepen and become far more emotionally intense. Little by little my defenses fall away, and I discover the feelings deeper inside.

When I meditate every day, the accumulation of clutter in the mind is vastly decreased. Over time many of these distracting superficial thoughts and feelings no longer seem to arise. At least if they do come up, they are so easily set aside that I don't pay much attention to them. From that point on, I begin to feel only what is left; the important feelings, issues and memories that are still unresolved. This is where felt sensing becomes so important.

For example, one day not so long ago I was working in the kitchen. It was in 2008 or 2009, during the crash, when David and I were under terrible financial stress I was feeling very anxious about money and about our future, and suddenly I saw the terrible struggle my parents went through. They were poor, and they worked very hard to provide for us. I saw how hard their lives were, how overworked and discouraged they became. They both died young. Now I have outlived them both.

For the longest time I couldn't find much compassion for them in my heart. It was hard for me to forgive their abuse and neglect, even after their deaths. But in that moment in the

kitchen, feeling my own anxiety and my own struggle, I felt empathy for them for the first time. I felt a flood of compassion in my heart. Not only did I feel compassion for my own suffering, but also a depth of understanding and forgiveness and love that was completely new. Those feelings opened up my heart, and I cried and cried. Finally I saw them as suffering human beings. No longer judging, I was able to see them simply ordinary people doing the best they could.

I don't think these insights could have happened if I hadn't been meditating every day. I love the ancient meditative breathing practice of watching and counting the breaths from 1 to 10 because the practice seems to always keep me in my body. The breathing practice brings the body/mind/wisdom into alignment.

## **GETTING TO THE BODY MIND WISDOM**

For the past twenty-five years or so I have constantly felt my body-voice alive in me, always giving me real time feedback, whether I like it or not. Sometimes I find feelings that I wish were different, but I have learned that if I ignore my inner voice, it is at my own risk. When I override my inner voice, I pay a price for my incongruence, and the price comes in feeling pain inside; I get a felt sense of aloneness, a sort of isolation, which I have come to recognize as self-abandonment.

Here is the part that is personal and sad for me. Self-abandonment was drummed into me as a child. It became my default response. Now I know that it is common among children of alcoholics. When I was little, I constantly had to watch and respond to my parents' moods. Because their moods were so important to my well-being, they became more important than my own. When I think about *all that...* I feel so sad. I have experienced a great deal of suffering through acting out this pattern in my adult life. It took me a long time to reach the point where I was able to be fully aware of the range of my possible choices in the moment, that is, whether or when to choose to take care of someone else's needs or my own.

## **TEACHING NWM**

We have had a variety of experiences in teaching this new practice. First I began teaching it to therapy clients. They were helped immensely, especially those who were very motivated by the desire to more skillfully handle the life crises they faced. The practice intensified their therapy sessions by bringing them more in touch with their felt sense of the issues. The increased intensity sped up their progress.

However, not everyone appreciated NWM. For 25 years I was a member of an ongoing meditation group that was working with very advanced Tibetan visualization techniques, for near and distant healing and for world peace. I very much enjoyed the visualization work we did together, but I couldn't help seeing the unhealed wounds that many carried. In one of our meetings, I guided them through an introductory process of NWM, and they reacted strongly. Several of them attacked me, some saying that I drew them away from the ecstasy of floating in the "ether", and others saying that they didn't want to feel their feelings. In fact, one of them said that getting away from her feelings was the very reason she meditated! I was surprised by the intensity of their response. And while a few others did say that NWM

helped them discovered valuable new insights about issues that were pressing, the majority were definitely shaken up by NWM.

We have been quite successful in teaching NWM to groups that are new to Focusing and meditation. We especially like groups that meet weekly or semi-weekly where we practice together and then share the ways in which the process is working or not working, so we can troubleshoot the problems that arise. We find that people in these groups love meditating together, and especially having me lead them into beginning meditation. They tell us that they feel supported in sustaining their daily practice. David and I plan to offer group training and coaching via the internet so that many people can easily get together. Sharing is very effective because so many of the issues that come up are common to everyone. People love having a space to share the insights they gain.

## TO CONCLUDE

We need a meditation practice that we can live with in the same way we live with Focusing, but a practice we do daily, so that the power of the process is deepened and magnified by the frequency and continuity of self-encounter. We have busy lives with families and work we don't want to give up. The discipline of daily practice is difficult to establish and maintain, but it has its own benefits, the most important being that personal power, confidence and resilience are built up within.

NWM is a continuing practice of self-reflection and self-inquiry which aims to help practitioners to return home to their essential self by crossing mindfulness meditation and Focusing practice in a way that brings the body mind wisdom in alignment faster than either Focusing or meditation alone. NWM provides a whole new level of consciousness that we are calling *knowing the Body/Mind Wisdom* which is the direct connection to your authentic self.

We have shared part of our personal story with you in order to show you how NWM enabled us to build a new life that is far more satisfying bringing a level of health, intimacy, friendship and community that we have never experienced before.

Now we can see ourselves in the light of a new and more compassionate reality. I am just as you are. We are all just human beings doing the best we can.

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Our new book, *New World Meditation Focusing—Mindfulness—Healing—Awakening* will be available on Amazon.com early in the New Year 2014