

TURNING OY TO JOY: A Thank You Letter to the Felt Sense

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Dear Felt Sense,

I have been meaning to write to you for some time now. I've known that I have had gratitude that I have wanted to express to you. "Gratitude" is not quite right. It's close, but the word "gratitude" doesn't say it deeply enough. I want to try to put into words what you've meant to me. (When I say that some tears come to my eyes.)

The contribution that you have made to what is good in my life, and to what I have done with the events and situations that I wish had never happened to me, has been huge. That's close to what brings my tears now. That...and a sense of an ocean-wave-like strength that I feel in my chest now, and that I have experienced in some of the most trying and painful times in my life, is what brings this eye moistening. Thank you.

You and I go back about fifteen years now. Like many of your friends I was introduced to you at a difficult time in my life, a time when I felt determined to heal from some difficult feelings that had stayed stuck within me for decades. You may notice that I said heal "from" difficult feelings. However, after knowing you all these many years, I would now say, "heal through these difficult feelings that had stayed stuck within me for so many years."

So I, the therapist, sought out therapy...again. At various points in the process, my therapist guided my attention to my body as I experienced it from the inside. Those instructions seemed strange to me. I was used to speaking *from* my thoughts or speaking *about* my feelings. This was different. And the process brought with it surprising insights that I could sense in my body, that I could actually feel like I was holding. No...that was not it. It was more like...surprising insights that I actually felt *IN* my *BODY* that brought with them a kind of easing and vitality. My therapist could see my *head-shaking-what-was-that-kind of* appreciation and said: "What you just did is called *Focusing*. If you want to learn more, talk to Christel Kraft."

I did, and that marked the beginning of what has become a central friendship in my life — a friendship with you. You weren't always easy to get in touch with. I often had to connect with you by going through difficult feelings, clear and hard to describe. I had to step aside from my usual analytic approach to my inner life so I could touch into what I was feeling in my body about some situation or relationship.

In the beginning being friends with you disoriented and confused me in ways that I deeply valued because as disoriented as I felt, some small feelings of being whole were coming to me from whenever we spent time together. I remember saying to Christel, when we were talking about my times with you and the effects *Focusing* was having on my life and my work, "I don't know *what a head is for* any more." (I'm a little clearer about that now.)

Through our friendship every aspect of my life grew, deepened and expanded, and at times got shook up. My life and work as a therapist changed profoundly — as did my marriage, my parenthood, my friendships, and my relationship to prayer — and my Jewish self.

Being friends with you in those first five years meant many early morning visits together with you, showing me the Focusing attitude, accompanying me to painful places and times in my past, and teaching me when I asked — one encounter at a time — what those places that lived in my body needed...from life, from others, and from me. There were so many tears that were shed in those numerous early morning visits together — sometimes sobbing tears of great sorrow, sometimes tears of relief as I heard myself. Sometimes there were tears of laughter. And always, despite the pain of those journeys you took me on, I came back feeling more whole, more me, more alive and more expansive. Although I didn't think of it in those terms, then, I now realize that our time together helped me to experience the transformation of OY (misery) to JOY.

I remember a colleague/friend, who knew that I was practicing Focusing, saying that I seemed different somehow, more relaxed. After checking in with you, I told him that “relaxed” wasn't quite *it*. Rather I felt “more comfortably uncomfortable.” That's what JOY meant to me in those early days of knowing you. JOY, then for me, meant feeling more whole, larger somehow, and experiencing what Gene Gendlin, who introduced you to the world, called *Life Forward Energy*. This experience of JOY would happen over and over again and little by little by little...the sense of being me, felt easier and more vital.

Being friends with you also brought me to other friends of yours: more teachers and students of yours, and to a lengthy and beloved Focusing partnership in which my partner and I (like others in partnerships all around the world) would, by deeply listening to each other, help you to make contact with us. This listening partnership allowed us to sense and articulate your often hard to discern message. Some of your friends became my friends — because we had you in common.

The point of departure for finding you was usually a painful emotion or body sensation about some situation. But I came to trust that the journey through the doorway of pain could lead to you, and that through various Focusing approaches to interacting with you, healing and insight could happen. I had come to trust what I call — the OY-to-JOY cycle — both personally and professionally. I, like, so many of your friends, experienced and trusted the truth of Leonard Cohen's oft quoted line: “There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.”

This trust served as preparation for me nearly eleven years later when a series of severe hardships hit my family's life. The most catastrophic was when my wife went into septic shock and for four days was in a coma. The doctors had predicted that my wife had a twenty percent chance of surviving. Friends and members of our synagogue community gathered together in the family-waiting-room of the intensive care unit to be with me, our sons, my wife's parents, and sisters. On the second night of the vigil, I recall speaking to a dear friend, and I heard myself say, “Whatever happens this OY can turn to JOY.”

This statement was not mere optimism. I didn't know what would happen. I had no idea about whether she would pull through or not. (She did). But because of what I had

experienced over and over again from years of finding spending time with you and the healing energies and wisdom you brought to me via Focusing, I just trusted. I trusted that whatever happened — and whatever difficult emotions would arise from whatever happened — some precious life forward energy and steps with meaning would come, and that somehow you and I...*I and we* would come through it all “better not bitter”. For that, I say: *Thank You! Thank You!* Maybe that is what the Joy that comes through engaging events, challenges, losses, (translation: OY) in a Focusing way, means to me. That ‘s close but not quite it. Give me a moment here...Closer for me is that JOY is the emergence of a sense of a fullness, (even an aching, heart scarred and frightened fullness sometimes), and an alive knowing that *I and life* have something to offer FROM that fullness. Yes. That ‘s it. JOY.

Over the past few years there have been serious consequences from my wife’s illness. Spending the time to get in touch with you continues to bring me insight and a vulnerable strength that helps me to make difficult adjustments.

There have been other hard times, as well. That includes my own health crisis two years ago. I have counted on my friendship with you. During momentary pauses, which I refer to as *inner google searches*, I find you. During longer solo Focusing sessions, I find you. And I know I will need to look for and find you in the years to come because there will always be challenges and stuck places that are, as Gene says, “between me and feeling all OK.” OY! And I trust that you will be there to nourish my other sources of nourishment — relationships, community, my work and received wisdom, so that I may experience the many hues of joy.

Thank you!

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