

# STAYING IN FOCUS

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APPLICATIONS OF FOCUSING

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### *A NEW TOWN AND NEW EARTH*

By **DIONIS GRIFFIN**, *Focusing Trainer, Georgia, USA*

Gene Gendlin said, in his often quoted talk at the first Focusing Institute Summer School (August 2006), "I would like to introduce a new term and call us 'the Town.' By which I mean all the new methods . . . all the psychological sophistication, all the interactional training, all the therapy, all that stuff.

"We need to become conscious that we are producing a new product. And the product is Human Attention. This Town that I am talking about is not conscious of itself. We are conscious that we are teaching Focusing to whoever listens . . . villages, management, it doesn't matter. We teach it to anybody, but we don't think yet even of each other as the Town. . . When I keep saying 'learn everything else, please don't just do Focusing,' I am talking about the Town. If you just learn Focusing--it is never true. You need more than five things. Together we are a change happening in the world."

Focusing has been a central part of my life for more than 20 years, ever since I attended a weekend workshop in Chicago in 1987 with Mary McGuire. My husband was my Focusing partner for 10 years, then many others. I've attended subsequent workshops, weekends and weeklongs. It has honed my parenting skills. I've mixed it with teaching relaxation training. I've wanted, somehow without being able, to make Focusing into my way of life, something I do to some degree on my own and all the time. Meanwhile, in my attempts to overcome PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), I have reached out to other things--at least five!

The approach to human attention is evolving! Focusing is a wonderful route to this goal. Another route is Eckhart Tolle's *A New Earth*, which has attained enormous popularity, and interviews between Eckhart and Oprah may still be seen on Oprah Winfrey's website. For me it is one of those other "things" that deepens my ability to Focus or have a human sort of attention.

In *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle brings old concepts to life in such a way that I finally "get" what *Nirvana*, enlightenment, and meditation are all about, and why people would want very much to seek these things. He explains the wonderful need and purpose for living in the "now." Of course, the best way I know to be in the "now" is to pay attention to my body and its felt sense. To Focus is to be with what is happening in the moment.

Tolle's book overlaps Focusing in several ways. Strikingly, he uses some of the same vocabulary, such as the terms "presence" and "shift." His concept of "presence" is similar to the one Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara MacGavin introduced in their *Focusing Manual I* (Calluna Press, Berkeley, CA, 2002, p.1), where they state: "Focusing is essentially a process of being present with something that needs attention in ones own experiencing," or on page 3, "Taking time at the beginning to practice how to move into Presence will help your Focusing enormously later."

Tolle defines "presence" a little differently. He *Continued on page 6*



*Dionis Griffin can be reached at [redome@aol.com](mailto:redome@aol.com)*

## FOCUS ON: *BALA JAISON*, FOCUSING COORDINATOR, TORONTO, CANADA

*An Interview with DIONIS GRIFFIN, Focusing Trainer, Georgia, USA*

**You have been an amazing volunteer, Bala. But first, can you tell us how you originally connected with Focusing and your amusing story about meeting Gene Gendlin?**

It was 1984. A client asked if I'd read Gendlin's book *Focusing*, which I had never heard of. She thought the way we were working was similar. Next session she came with a gift--Gene's book. I was astounded reading it, thinking, "Good grief, I'm already doing this!" Of course I didn't know the Focusing language, but what I was doing naturally was Focusing, and I remember musing, "I could have written this, but it's so simple it never would have occurred to me!" I contacted Gene who welcomed me to Chicago for two weekend workshops.

As Gene got into the material, I became increasingly uncomfortable as he talked about "going down" and "being friendly" to all the places in yourself you didn't like. I'd been a student of metaphysics and an avid meditator for a number of years. My training wasn't to "go down and be friendly;" it was to "transcend and detach!"

At the first break, realizing how upset I was, I decided to question Gene about this process. (I hadn't yet grasped that what I was doing with clients was NOT what I was doing with myself!) So I went right up to Gene, but instead of the "meaningful conversation" I had imagined, I immediately burst into tears and blurted out, "You're not supposed to go down, you're supposed to go up!!"

Of course the rest is history. Gene totally understood--as only he can--and I "got" that he got me in a way that was beyond words. That moment marked the beginning of an amazing connection with Gene, and then with Mary McGuire, during the course of two weekends. I stayed in close touch with Mary when I returned to Toronto, and eventually moved to Chicago for six months to study Focusing with Gene and Mary, and become a Focusing trainer--and, during that period (over a noteworthy glass of white wine with Mary!) the weeklong was born which we taught every August and November from 1985-1990.

**That was a lot of volunteering, wasn't it?**

Yes, it certainly was. That period in Chicago changed my life and formed the basis of everything else that followed--so I'd say that in the end, I got more than I gave.

**What did you do when you returned to Toronto to resume your practice?**

My return to Toronto was thrilling. In addition to my practice, I taught Focusing courses with a passion, until 1989 when I started to get restless. Something was still missing, so I went back to study Marriage and Family Therapy and was introduced, among other things, to Brief Therapy. Exactly as I'd felt about Focusing, I knew there was "something there" for me. From day one of that program I was nearly jumping out of my seat with excitement, quietly, of course. What I was learning was *exactly* what I already knew--but at a different level--something like Gene's "taking the elevator." The content was similar, but on a different floor! I also made a deep connection with Insoo Kim Berg, the founder of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy; so I now had mentors in both models.

I knew that I had to write a book demonstrating the blending of these two models--that it was possible to be both brief and deep! It took ten years to pull together *Integrating Experiential and Brief Therapy*, which, with the help of Glenn Fleisch, I called SOFT (Solution Oriented Focusing Therapy). I travel frequently teaching the SOFT approach and always joke that I carry two sets of notes. In Canada, Brief Therapy is very popular--groups here are hungry for Experiential work. In Europe, Client-Centered Therapy is prevalent, so the Europeans are very eager for



*Bala Jaison can be contacted at [balaj@simpatico.ca](mailto:balaj@simpatico.ca).*

the Brief work. Because Brief Therapy asks the most skillful questions ever, and Experiential therapists listen equally as skillfully, reciprocity exists. It's a great "marriage!" I also teach Focusing Levels in preparation for the year-long Certification program, mostly for therapists, and teach and write about Focusing extensively.

**Can you speak about your volunteer work with the "Focusing Folio" and how it has evolved?**

I took over the *Folio* from Mary McDonald in 1990. At that time a modest publication, printed and bound locally, the first step was moving to a more professional bound book format. I also, over the years, chose co-editors and worked with a number of very fine people. For the 30-year 400 page tribute issue, I asked Paula Nowick to co-edit (a fantastic choice!), and together we tackled an at times overwhelming project. We had 31 articles by 40 different authors and recruited the help of guest editors, but the bottom line for the fine editing rested with us.

**How does the Folio differ from "The Focusing Connection" and "Staying in Focus"?**

Ann's *Connection* is very current, keeping us up-to-date regularly on what people are doing in the community. It is readable and very inspiring. The Institute's *Staying in Focus* usually honors particular people in the Focusing community, highlighting specific areas of Focusing applications in many countries.

The *Folio* is the academic journal for the Institute covering a wide range of applications, usually with a specific theme. It is important to the Focusing community because it tracks the applications of these various themes and demonstrates a diversity of approaches. The *Folio* also gives our work solid professional credibility.

**What were some of the highlights and/or challenges of working on last year's issue?**

The highlights: working with Paula and connecting with many of our writers and guest editors. The challenges were varied, but the biggest was editing the seemingly endless pages of material for a December '08 deadline. Our standards for this issue were high, and I felt the clock ticking for 9 months. There were times when I was editing at 3 AM or working all weekend non-stop, because I didn't have any other time to do it. (My husband was particularly delighted when this project was over!) The results were worth it. We feel that this *Folio* is the most sophisticated and well put-together issue to date.

**Have you seen an evolution of thought in the Focusing community?**

Yes, definitely. Focusing seems now like the spine or backbone of many applications: in therapy, philosophy, education, business, art, children's work, etc. At first, although Gene never intended the model to be rigid, most of us followed the six-steps like the gospel! By the mid-90's I was "secretly" integrating Focusing with Brief Therapy but afraid to present the material to our community. I was sure they'd throw me out! Then, at the International Conference in Wisconsin in 1995, which I co-hosted with the Institute, I decided to 'bite-the-bullet' and present the SOFT approach. To my total amazement, many people told afterwards that they, too, were combining Focusing with other things and had also felt leery about presenting. So I'll always remember that conference as a real opening for people to express their creative and sometimes unconventional applications of Focusing. Now we are all comfortable with what I'll call "creative combinability." This Tribute Issue of *Folio* honors that evolution over 30 years.


**What about your volunteer work for the Toronto International Conference in 2005?**

Co-organizing the International Conference in Toronto with the TFC (The Focusing Collective) was indeed a huge volunteer effort (as it is for all conference organizers) and truly, one of the highlights of my life. The TFC formed a bond that exists today, and what made it possible was our attitude, both about our vision and our respect for each other. We really did embody the principles of Focusing in everything we did: we listened, we reflected, and when we didn't agree we got quiet and had attunements until we came to consensus. Our process was truly profound--as were our "famous dinners" and laughter together!

**Do you have a felt sense about writing in general?**

I love to write, and generally it comes naturally to me. My biggest transition was learning to tune my brain directly to the computer. I have no idea exactly when the shift happened, but in Focusing terms it had something to do with "making friends" with the computer!

**Do you have any closing thoughts about your felt sense of volunteer work in general?**

Speaking from a felt sense, when you love something or someone, you want to give back. It's as natural as breathing. I love Focusing. I love this community, and whatever I give back pales in comparison to what I have learned and received over the years. Is it work? Yes, especially this last *Folio*, but it is an act of unconditional love, too! 

## RECOGNIZING VOLUNTERS WHO SUPPORT THE FOCUSING INSTITUTE

**Thanks to Paula Nowick** When asked to write about “Volunteering” as co-editor of the *Folio*, Paula Nowick hesitated a moment. “I usually think of “volunteering as doing something grimly charitable for people in need. But the editing work on the *Folio* was too pleasurable to meet that definition and, more importantly, it involved interacting with many of the most brilliant, heartfelt, and innovative people in our community. Yes, of course, editing consumed a hideous number of brain-challenging hours; yes, of course, keeping track of six or seven crisscrossing revisions from 40 authors, 24 guest editors, 14 proofreaders, Bala, and myself demanded such a complex color-coding system that some pages resembled fractal rainbows; and yes, of course, computer glitches, vanishing files, and server outages made me yearn for quill pens and candlelight. But through it all, Bala and I kept pointing out to each other the moments of fun we were having amid the rigorous tasks before us. And we found so many, many such moments that I am now relooking at my concept of volunteering. Somehow there’s More than I ever realized!”

**Thanks to the many volunteers who have donated their time to organize Focusing conferences.** Joan Lavender writes, “We had an easy time planning because we used [freeconferencecall.com](http://freeconferencecall.com). The work is a labor of love for me, and it is always great to get to know the Focusing and related communities better.” Says Lynn Preston, “I have offered my loft in downtown New York for workshops and as a place for visiting teachers to stay. I am pleased and amused when people I have never met greet me warmly and tell me they feel they know me, because they have had deep and vitalizing experiences at workshops in my home.”

**Serge Prengel has volunteered a series called “Conversations” on the TFI Website.** “When I read Gene Gendlin’s book almost 20 years ago, I recognized a familiar process. But there were not many Focusers in New York City at that time. So, after my training, I essentially thought of Focusing as something to do on my own, or with clients. After reconnecting with the Focusing community, which has grown by now, I have come to believe that the contribution of Focusing is not just its method or philosophy, but also its organization of a broad community where this approach can grow. It feels very nice to be, in some way or another, part of this group.”

“A few years ago, I heard Gene Gendlin talk about a different way to reach non-Focusers, suggesting that, if you were, say, an architect who is also a Focuser, you would talk to other architects in their terms as opposed to “preaching,” using special Focusing terms. This is what led to my writing the “carrying forward” e-book.

“As I got involved in explaining Focusing to non-Focusers in their own language, I became aware of how variable this approach can be. Yesterday, in a therapy session, a client was resonating with a handle that he called an ‘amorphous blob.’ It had a lot to do with the ‘immense sadness’ that he had been feeling, but, in a Focusing mode, he could also experience a sense of contentment about his ability to ‘touch’ the ‘amorphous blob’ and even laugh at the name he had found for it. As I write, Focusing as an ‘amorphous blob’ resonates.

“My ‘Focusing conversations’ are discovering the many forms that this ‘blob’ can take. Each month, I talk with a Focuser and discover the process through this person’s sense of it. If you haven’t already discovered this series from deep within the Focusing website, I invite you to go see--no--go hear it.” [www.focusing.org/conversations](http://www.focusing.org/conversations)).

**Ricki Morse is the design editor of this newsletter.** I came across Gene’s name at a *Psychology Today* (Milton Erickson) conference in the early 1990s in Las Vegas. I remembered having read his *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* and wondered if this was the same guy. By his second sentence I was hooked. Focusing was exactly the missing piece for my practice as a client-centered psychologist. (It has since become the missing piece in my personal growth in conjunction with my long time study of Zen Buddhism.) I signed up for the first training I could find, in Chicago with Mary Hendricks. That day sealed my commitment, and I joined the first group of therapists Mary trained in New York City. That class, Group One, still meets every other month, and I attend as many meetings as I can. I volunteer because that’s part of Focusing, to embody the ideas that enliven my life experience.

In 1999 Mary asked me to help out with a proposed Focusing newsletter. I readily agreed as I had taught English Literature and edited textbooks in an earlier career and had developed some expertise in computer publishing. I took on the formatting of the newsletter, developing the graphics and subsequently refining the photographs. I do the final proofing and “squeezing” to achieve the necessary fit. I enjoy the process of an issue coming together, little by little, and the satisfaction of producing a finished product. Most of all, I appreciate all the contributors and relish sharing their writing with the larger Focusing community.

# FOCUSING AND MEDITATION

By *STEFAN BEYER*, *Focusing Member, Werther, Germany*

As I see it, meditation is the experience of an “existential” dimension, which may be called Awareness, Now-ness, or Aliveness. Focusing can also be understood as related to this dimension (especially to Aliveness) but does not provide a direct experience of it. Once the organism knows the knack of meditation, Focusing can be a meaningful complementary practise and can facilitate organic spiritual development. Let me explain all this.

First of all, what is the “knack of meditation”?

Gestalt pictures present the image of a vase, of two confronting faces, or another one which can be seen either as the image of an old or a young woman. Once a viewer has a stable opinion about the image, it is hard to see the other option. One must point: Look, what you see as a nose of an old woman can also be seen as the chin of a smaller young face. In the same way, meditation is a change of view. What you experience as a person confronted with a world can also be experienced as an Awareness containing both a person and the outside world.

One popular understanding of meditation asserts that meditation is a form of deliberate attention, as if being aware were like using a mental muscle. You try to be aware of your breath or your passing thoughts, and you usually succeed for some seconds or minutes, then you become unaware for some time and start daydreaming. Popularly it is recommended that you pull your attention back to what is “here and now.”

But what is happening in those moments when you daydream? You are aware at those times, too, although not deliberately. If you say, “Now I am not meditating, I am daydreaming,” something in you knows you are daydreaming. That part which knows is aware. There is an effortless awareness in the background all the time. Instead of pulling yourself out of the apparent non-awareness of daydreaming, you can remember the natural uninterrupted effortless awareness in the background. I find this works and provides an opening to practising deliberate attention.

“Here-and-now” is not a quality of objects in the world. In a certain sense, all objects are “there-and-then.” For instance, it takes time for light and sound to travel to the eyes or ears, and it takes further time to process them in the body; when we look at the sun we see it as it was a few minutes ago. But “here and now” is a quality of Awareness, and all objects can have this quality. Like with a TV screen, the screen is always “now;” therefore anything it shows us is “now,” whether it be a fantasy, a science fiction movie, or a historical event set in ancient Rome. To be present, to meditate, means to remember the screen. It does not mean to change the content of the movie.

We access ever-existent awareness by heeding ever-existent Now-ness. Assume your situation does not significantly change within a few minutes. Let’s say the situation now is roughly the same as five minutes ago. But there is a fundamental difference, and that difference is a sensible quality of Now-ness. Can you feel that? Do you like it?

To come back to the change of view, as with the Gestalt pictures: Awareness/Now-ness/Aliveness can also be seen as my real Center, as “I.” What I conventionally take as constituting my identity: thoughts, felt senses, and body sensations, become objects, parts of the movie. It is possible to disidentify from them, to see them as “things over there.” But I cannot disidentify from Awareness or Nowness. I cannot look from a non-aware place and see Awareness as any kind of thing. It is always at my side. It is never what I look at but always that which I look out of. The experience of Awareness as my real Center feels like Abiding in It or being the whole situation at any moment.

Although living from another, transpersonal, center may seem like a move against the organism, it turns out to be maximally carrying forward. On this level everything is paradoxical, giving up a certain involvement with a person turns out to be person-centered or loving and serving the person in a new way. This principle of helpful dis-identification is also used in Focusing in several ways. Gendlin’s life work means a revolution in philosophy and psychology, yet Focusing in my opinion cannot provide the first experience of meditation.

There is, however, an assumption in Focusing of a life process, which exists all the time and on which Focusing relies. The common “deep struc-



Contact Stefan Beyer at [sensingbeing@yahoo.de](mailto:sensingbeing@yahoo.de)

ture” of Focusing and meditation is this Aliveness, which is probably a synonym for ever-existing effortless Awareness. (How do you know that you are alive? By finding yourself aware.) Again, in Focusing, we don’t ask for Aliveness as a direct experience. We don’t ask, “What is aliveness?” We only use it.

There is a cartoon of a Zen master saying to his disciples, “The road to enlightenment is long and difficult, which is why I asked you to bring sandwiches and a change of clothing.” Along with sandwiches and clean clothes, complementary methods that encourage empathy, beauty, or helping others (and oneself!) are useful on the road, although (or because!?) these approaches take the personal entity seriously. This is the place where Focusing fits best. Many spiritual traditions start with compassion for others at the expense of oneself, whereas Focusing starts with compassion for oneself, which often extends to caring for others. In other words, while traditional ways recommend pushing oneself into a compassionate attitude, in Focusing, compassion arises naturally and is real.

Also complementary to meditation is contact with people who are stable in Now-ness (this contact is called Darshan or Satsang), because this state is contagious for those who wish to be affected, just as yawning or laughing is contagious. Certain kinds of physical exercises or body work also make it easier to rest in Awareness.

I personally find that I may have an intense interest in meditation for some days or weeks, and then it has no appeal for weeks or even months. I then switch to bodywork such as Feldenkrais or to Focusing/TAE or to no special methods at all and then come back to meditation. Once “the body” has had the experience, Focusing can help decide when it is time to pursue it or what else to do first. Using the two together, I think one can experience a spiritual development in an organic and integrative way.

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DIONIS GRIFFIN, *A New Town and New Earth* continued from page 1

describes it as “consciousness without thought,” or a connection with Universal Thought (*A New Earth*, p. 259). Tolle suggests that this new consciousness will bring about a “shift.” He states, “As you read, a shift takes place within you . . .” (p. 6) or (p. 259) and “Awakening is a shift in consciousness in which thinking and awareness separate.” My experience of both “presense” and “shift,” either when Focusing or when reading Tolle, makes me conclude that experientially, Focusing and Tolle are talking about the same thing. In other words, the definitions vary, but the experience of “presence” or “shift” remains the same.

While Focusing elucidates the “now,” “presence,” and other concepts in *The New Earth*, Tolle adds some concepts that help me with Focusing. Two of these terms, not found in Focusing, are Ego and Space. In our awakening consciousness, he says, it is necessary to drop the Ego, that part of you that wants to be in control and has an agenda. I find that I can will dropping my ego and the result--*mirabile dictu*--is that I enter more easily into “presence.”

Awareness of Space is not generally included in Focusing instruction, and I find a spatial awareness particularly useful when Focusing by myself. If I concentrate only on my felt sense, my mind wanders off track. But if I include an awareness of the outside world, then I feel I have come “home” to a relaxed attention that I could use at all times, either when alone or with others. The awareness of Space is the key that ties together both the inner and outside world, and shows me how I can include everything--and need ignore nothing.

So how does this work, in a practical way, to create a new type of Human Attention? In my case, I try to take 5 to 15 minutes per day and sit quietly, becoming aware simultaneously of space and my internal felt senses. I include sights, sounds, smells, my inner feelings and the space that connects them all.

If my mind is distracted, and I'm not getting into that special place of awareness, I tell myself, “Let go the Ego.” This helps me be with whatever is present, without judging or attempting to change myself. When my mind strays to thoughts of the past or future, I gently bring my mind back to the now. “The now is the only moment there is.” This statement runs through my mind like a mantra.

Am I Focusing? Or meditating? I have heard that these represent two quite different skills. I have to confess that I've never been able to meditate, or even to understand why this is such a satisfying practice for so many people. So I must be Focusing. I really am interested in my felt sense, after all. Still, my goal is not to achieve a shift or a new step; I am going after a sense of peace. My long term goal is to become more tranquil and accepting of all life's ups and downs--the goal of meditation. Perhaps I am blending the two.

I should be able to do this anywhere--being present with all my senses, felt and otherwise. I can do it with eyes open or closed. I can be interrupted, it doesn't matter. Have I achieved *Nirvana*? No, but at least I have some additional material for the building of--what shall we call it?--Attending Town.

# FOCUSING MEETS BUDDHISM

By *MANJUDEVA*, *Focusing Trainer, England*

We walk silently down to the lake along a candlelit path. Each of us adds a stone to a small homemade raft. The stone will carry our message of empathy to the deep places inside of us, the deep places in the lake. The boat is set aflame and towed out to the centre of the lake. As the boat slowly burns in the clear night, the stones drop down, taking our messages into the darkness. We chant quietly and watch . . .

This ritual marked the end of a weeklong Focusing and Meditation retreat, held in Scotland and led by Jutika and me, both Buddhist practitioners. It's our third year of running them, each one a great success. This week lies close to the heart of what I do: taking Focusing into a Buddhist context, or perhaps more fundamentally, taking Focusing to people who want to awaken, want to become freer, who sense there is more to life.

I came across Focusing on a Buddhist retreat about six years ago. Hearing it described as "the body's own wisdom" effected me deeply--has been transformative for me. There are probably dozens of approaches to following the Buddhist path--a huge tradition. In essence Buddhism offers a path away from a painful way of living, to a way of living in happiness, freedom and spontaneity. Meditation is a central tool in this journey, providing a way to see ourselves clearly, without prejudice. Since Buddhism is relatively new in this culture, it is all too easy to misunderstand and misapply the teachings.

Young, confused, I came to Buddhist meditation anxiously wanting the peace and calm that Buddhism seemed to promise. I dived in and practiced a fulltime Buddhist life for over 12 years. Then the cracks began to show--the pain and confusion still there--more than ever. I now see that in my attempts to be "spiritual," I left myself behind.

Easily misunderstood ideas did not help--teachings that there is no self, that the ego is to be battled with and overcome, that there are negative states to eradicate. In essence, though, I was running away from my experience and trying to create a different, less painful one! And to make matters worse, I was punishing myself for not succeeding and therefore not being spiritual enough! I see my own story mirrored in others.

In this context, Focusing says your experience is not something to run away from! In meditation we subtly push aside those distractions, yet in doing this we run the danger of separating ourselves from the possibility of change. I offer the idea that the conscious mind may not have all the answers, that the body may have something important to say, have wisdom even. I offer something that says you are OK as you are. More than that, that you are deeply OK, even beautiful as you are, and that trying to be more spiritual could get in the way of knowing that.

I ask them to be curious. Are you interested in what is really going on in your body, during meditation? Are you open to every aspect of yourself? Do you want to let in the gentle light of Presence and acceptance? Are you ready to see that what you thought was an enemy may in fact be protecting something valuable inside you, even guarding a treasure? Are you ready to trust what is there, that it is already enough and already profoundly spiritual?



Contact me ([manju@livingfocusing.co.uk](mailto:manju@livingfocusing.co.uk)) for a list of related articles and books.

Focusing has so much to offer those seeking self-understanding and change. Focusing brings a deeply sensitive, embodied and experiential method of meeting yourself. It also brings the gift of a listener or companion. How valuable is that?, when so much of Buddhist meditation is done silently in your own mind. It is wonderful for people to feel witnessed at this deep level.

There are other possible benefits of Focusing in this path. It helps to bring the noble ideals and aspirations of Buddhism into relationship with the real experience inside. It might sound grand, but Focusing offers a connection with what you could call "soul." By this I mean the deeper places in you, formed by your unique life and circumstances, i.e., the imperatives of your life. These places call to us to be met, and we ignore them at our peril. It's early days in this meeting of Buddhist practice and Focusing, but I am confident and excited by it.

# FOCUSING AND RELAXATION

By **LUIS LÓPEZ GONZALEZ**, *Focusing Trainer, Barcelona, Spain*

I was introduced to Focusing after years of relaxation exercises and meditation experience. As a teacher in a Barcelonese high school I was inspired to design a Relaxation Program for the Classroom, which has been put into book form (López Gonzalez, L., *Relajación en el aula. Recursos para la educación emocional*, Wolters Kluwer, 2007, Madrid.) The most scientific part of the Program is contained in my doctoral thesis (University of Barcelona, October 2009).

After exhaustive study of three disparate models, I isolated nine psychosomatic resources which are used to some degree in all relaxation methods. These are: self-observation (being aware of our sensations, posture, emotions, thoughts, etc.), breathing, vocal or inner speech, muscle relaxation, visualization, sensory perceptions (sight, sound, taste, smell, etc.) bodily energy (principally the flow of “chi”), posture and movement. I realized there was a need for a model based on the emotions and, more specifically, on the felt sense. I posed the following question: Would the felt sense methodology be useful in eliciting the Relaxation Response?

By changing from the question “what and how can we relax” to “from what are we relaxing, what is it we are trying to change or release?” I found my own handle to carry me forward. In this way, I could make a qualitative jump with respect to other models, most of which start from the erroneous idea (as Descartes did), of “*cogito ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am.” They believe that the part that thinks is separated from the body, or, even worse, that the body is completely at the dictate of the mind.



Luis can be reached at [pustinia@adslmail.es](mailto:pustinia@adslmail.es)

## MY RELAXATION MODEL STEPS

1. **FOCUS:** Ask yourself, “What is between me and feeling relaxed?” Deeply self-observe on three levels: a) your negative sensations (such as, “There’s a pain in my left elbow. My jaw feels tense,”) b) your general state of mind: (“My mind is agitated, in flow, or almost asleep.”) c) focusing on the chest area to find your emotional map. (“There’s a pain in my chest, my stomach feels tense.”)
2. **FEEL** what you wish and need to release. You can do this step by going into detail or by noting some global experience.
3. **RELEASE** and release more and more. Releasing consists of imagining the feeling expanding to the right, left, behind and ahead of you, like a flower opening, a piece of ice dissolving or a cloud expanding. “It” happens along the horizontal plane. It does not depend of the force of gravity. Spend some time here, and apply one or more of the nine psychosomatic resources. Ask yourself: “Which resource do I need in order to release? Breathing? Voice and speech? Movement? Sensory perception?” This step depends on your own psychosomatic self-knowledge. A coach or teacher can also help.
5. **LET IT FALL:** You start to “fall” in the moment you release “all,” becoming as if one with gravity and with the earth, letting yourself sink deeper and deeper. You want the perception that it’s happening in a vertical plane.
5. **REST:** After verifying how successful each resource has been, and after “falling” more and more, you want to anchor the body shift and rest with a whole passivity and a receptive attitude. You want this step to be a global feeling, occurring through all planes.

The work of Portuguese neuroscientist Antonio Damasio helped me argue my proposal in a double way. “Reason can be felt (even a mathematical operation),” and “The body is the main stage for the emotions.” His research sees the body as somatic marker, i.e., the body has its own role in deciding human behavior. A person who has brain damage and can remember nothing, can feel and will decide according to his emotions.

I ask my pupils to give special attention to both open hands and the tongue. The tongue was the first way in which we knew the environment, and it later became a “bridge” between our thoughts and our words.. You want it to feel relaxed, heavy, full, and expanded. Our hands and fingers were our last genetic advancement and their sensibility is extraordinary. Nobody can in fact relax and maintain closed fists. You want your hands and fingers (especially the middle segment of them) to feel hot and full of energy. In my high school, this exercise takes no more than ten minutes, and although it has an exact protocol, there have been many variations depending on the skill of the teacher and the needs of the students. The data I gathered has shown a positive correlation with many scales, such as the Relaxation Scale, the Emotional Education Scale, and the Classroom Climate Scale.