

FOCUSING

*HOW TO GAIN DIRECT ACCESS
TO YOUR BODY'S KNOWLEDGE*



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FOCUSING TO ACCESS THE WISDOM OF THE BODY

Focusing is a beautiful and meditative approach to psychotherapy and personal growth. It offers a deep parallel to the practice of mindfulness meditation in a carefully developed and sensitive way. Focusing is a powerful technique underpinned by research and the experiential reality that our unresolved problems actually exist in our physical body. By “Focusing” on them, we can identify and change them - and we know if we are doing it correctly because each of the six steps is marked by a release of tension.

The six steps of Focusing shows how we can find the entry point to the vast resource of our embodied knowledge, how we can stay long enough to interact with it, and the many different things we can do when we reach such a profound level. The focusing skill - learning to access and dissolve personal problems by focusing on the language and wisdom of the body - can be mastered by anyone in or out of therapy.

Focusing is a term coined by Dr Eugene Gendlin who was professor of Psychology at the University of Chicago. You can read Gendlin’s book FOCUSING or Google using the search term *Gendlin Focusing* to find out more about it. Gendlin devoted his entire career of research and practice to discover the answer to this question: What is the critical factor that helps people to get unstuck from their emotional problems and which approaches or techniques in psychotherapy are most effective in promoting psychological change or growth? He analyzed literally thousands of therapist-client sessions recorded on tape. He received three awards from the American Psychological Association for this work.

Professor Gendlin and his associates found that the most successful client - the one who shows real and tangible change on psychological tests and in real life - can be picked out fairly easily from recorded therapy sessions. What these people do in their therapy hours is different from others. What is the crucial difference? It is not the therapist’s technique - differences in methods of therapy seem to mean surprisingly little. Nor does the difference lie in what the client talks about. The difference is in *how* they talk. And that is only an outward sign of the real difference: *what the successful clients do inside themselves*.

The purpose of this handout is to tell you what they do and how you can do it. For this uncommon skill, this internal act, not only is useful in a psychotherapist’s office, it is a way of approaching any problem or situation. The skill is not only for problems. It can become an internal source of guidance for decision-making and creativity that is consulted many times every day to unlock the wisdom of your body. It will enable you to find and *change* where your life is stuck, cramped, hemmed in, slowed down, or buzzing too fast. And it will enable *you* to change - to live from a deeper place than just your thoughts and your feelings.



BODY TRUST

Your body-mind is a great and sacred mystery. It is a complex, life-maintaining system. The divine life-force (holy spirit) in the body always tends in the direction of feeling better. Often, we feel so much wrong that we come to accept those bad feelings as the basic state of things. But it is not. The bad feeling is the body knowing and pushing toward what good would be.

Every bad feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of being if you give it space to move toward its rightness. The very existence of bad feelings within you is evidence that your body knows what is wrong and what is right. It must know what it would be like to feel perfect, or it would not evoke a sense of *wrong*.

Your body, with its sense of rightness, knows what would feel right. The feelings of “bad” or “wrong” inside you, are, in effect, your body’s measurement of the distance between “perfect” and the way it actually feels. It knows the direction. It knows this just as surely as you know which way to move a crooked picture.



If the crookedness is pronounced enough for you to notice it at all, there is absolutely no chance that you will move the picture in the wrong direction and make it still more crooked while mistaking that for straight. The sense of what is wrong carries with it, inseparably, a sense of the direction toward what is right.

The moral and ethical values we *think about* and try to control may be relative and various, but the values by which our bodies move away from bad feelings are much more objective. The body is an incredibly fine system within nature and the cosmos. Its *holistic* sensing of what is true and valuable and what is not indicates much more than a thought or an emotion can. The life process in us has its direction and this is not relative. All the values we try to formulate are relative to the living process in us and should be measured against it.

In focusing you will often find that some words come with a strong sense of rightness at a given moment and give you a body shift, but are later superseded by what comes at a later step. You cannot - and should not - trust any *single* set of words, any *one* feeling, any *one* body-message that comes. But you can definitely trust the whole series of steps by which your body moves to resolve and change a wrong state of being.

3.

When something goes wrong, the body knows it and immediately sets about the task of repairing itself. The body knows what its own right state feels like and is constantly checking and adjusting its processes to stay as close to that state as possible. It maintains its temperature, for instance, in a narrow range near 98 degrees. People all over the world have precisely the same temperature, whether they live on the Equator or in the Arctic. Your temperature stays in the same range through summer and winter, in exercise or repose, for your body knows what *right* is and continually monitors and adjusts and compensates to maintain the proper balance.

You don't have to exercise any conscious control over this temperature-maintaining process. You trust your body to carry the process on day by day - and you also trust it to know when something is going wrong. It always does know. When your temperature slips out of that narrow "right" range, you feel unmistakably less than good.

Medical help only ministers to the body, only helps here and there with what is always the body's own healing process. A doctor knows how to help heal a wound, but the wound heals itself. Similarly, whatever you do, sense then whether it has helped your body's healing take a step or not.

Your body knows the direction of healing and life. If you take the time to listen to it through focusing, it will give you the steps in the right direction. Don't think of yourself as a fixed structure whose structure and shape can be analyzed once and for all. You are a *process* capable of continual change and forward movement. The "problems" inside you are only those parts of the process that have been *stopped*.



If you focus on your problems as they manifest in your body, with a positive expectation of inner change, the stuckness is released and the life force gets moving again. The change is created by the very act of gently observing and allowing the physical shifts to happen as the energy is unstopped.

So please allow yourself a few moments where you stop being a monument to your troubles. Most people harbor a feeling that they must make their bodies express their troubles constantly. We live life with our bodies. Every trouble or bad situation is like a cramp in the body. As long as the body is cramped by trouble, it already has the shape of the trouble and therefore can't cope with the trouble while *being* the trouble. Therefore focusing begins with giving your body a pause, a break, in which to become whole.

But you can walk up to your poor body, standing there cramped, the monument to everything that's wrong, and say: "It's OK. We won't forget. You can rest a while. Later you can come back and stand as a monument again, but now, let's take a break!"



FIRST MOVEMENT: CLEARING A SPACE FOR YOURSELF

The first movement in focusing is enormously important because if it can happen, the rest will probably happen too. In the first movement you clear a space for yourself to live in while the rest of the focusing process is going on.

Set down the heavy load of your problems as your *mind* defines them and trust that your body has the wisdom to deal with them. Sit down, close your eyes and breathe deeply and slowly. Deep slow breathing means diaphragmatic breathing. If you don't know how to do this, listen to the CD BREATH OF LIFE where you are guided through the steps of how to stop doing fast shallow chest breathing and how to return to natural healthy belly breathing. The movement of the breath keeps the life force moving. Now you can deal with your problems with a relaxed, loose body.

Now ask yourself, "How do I feel? Why don't I feel wonderful right now? What is bugging me this particular day?"



Stay quiet. Listen. Let what comes come. On any given day you are likely to find that perhaps half a dozen problems keep you tense inside. Some may be major life problems that you have wrestled with many times before. Everybody carries some such list around from one year to the next, and on any particular day one or two such problem areas will seem to be uppermost. Do not try to list every problem you can think of, but only what has you tense now.

Along with major personal problems, you are also likely to find that some relatively trivial ones are upsetting your tranquility at a given moment.

Let all these problems come up and out: everything that is keeping you from feeling absolutely content right now. **DON'T GET SNAGGED ON ANY ONE PROBLEM.** Just list the problems mentally, the big and the small, the major and the trivial together. Stack them in front of you and step back and survey them from a distance.

Stay cheerfully detached from them as much as you can. "Well, except for all of these, I'm fine," you can now say. It might be an awful list but that *is* all.

"There's that business about George and Jane. And there's that loneliness thing - yes, I know that one well, that's an old one. And there's that funny little one about what I said to Chris yesterday."

Do you feel a small increase of well-being in you? Keep stacking the problems until you hear something say, "Yes, except for those things I'm fine."

A VAST SPACE

The first movement (clearing a space) can be done alone, for its own sake. If you do it very slowly, you may come to a state that seems important in its own right. Then you might leave the rest of focusing for another time.

To do this first movement in this way is more elaborate. You put your attention in your body, and you propose to your body that *you feel totally fine and joyful about how your life is going*. Then you sense what comes there, usually some discomfort about something in your life. You see what that is (large or trivial doesn't matter), and you acknowledge it ("Yes, that's there"). Then you place it next to yourself, in a friendly way, as if on the floor.

Now you ask your body, "What would come, in my body, if this problem were somehow all solved?" Whatever your mind answers, you wait until you sense what comes in your body. Then you let that be there for a little while.

Now you ask, "Except for this, do I feel totally fine and joyful about how my life is going?" You do the same thing with what next comes. Each time, you wait for the way your body responds to the questions.

After five or six things that usually come in this way, there is one more: There is usually, for each person, a "background feeling" that is always there (for instance, "always gray," "always a little sad," "always trying too hard"). What quality is always there, now too, and comes between you and feeling fine? Set it aside as well ("Sometime I'll see what more goes with that... not now"). Again ask, "What would come in my body, if that were also set aside?"

By this means you can sometimes come to an opening out, a sense of vast space.

Under all the packages each of us carries, a different self can be discovered. *You are not any of the things you have set aside. You are no content at all!*

When you arrive at this vast space, you might want to stay a while and just be there. But to arrive there involved specific questions put to your body, and a wait for some specific response from your body.



A FRIENDLY HEARING

The first movement is the time when you establish an environment of friendly feeling within yourself. You prepare to give yourself a fair hearing.

“How are you now?” you ask, gently. “What’s with you, right now?” “What’s the main thing for you right now?”

And then you don’t answer in words. No, you wait. Let the answer be the feelings that come in your body.

People always think of some long list of what might, or ought to, trouble them. This is not the list we want. We want only to hear what is now keeping your body from feeling sound.

At first you might hit a blank and get impatient, because, after all, you think you know. “I’m fine, except for my bad feeling, as usual, about my main relationship, and that other worry.” But this is answering your question yourself. The body doesn’t answer that quickly. It takes about thirty seconds. Surely you would be willing to accord your body thirty seconds? And yet, oddly, most people never do.

Look at your watch and see how long thirty seconds are. This will make you aware of their surprisingly lengthy span. Take thirty seconds. Try it now.

Most people are pretty unfriendly towards themselves most of the time. If you are like most, you have treated yourself less like a friend than like a roommate you don’t like. You grumble at yourself, insult yourself, get impatient with yourself when things go wrong. You construct a model of the ideal person you wish you were, and then you condemn yourself because you are imperfect as measured against that ideal. “Oh, I’m just lazy,” you might insult yourself. “If I really wanted to get somewhere, I’d work harder. I set up these good goals for myself and then I back off and flounder and make excuses.”

And so the lecture goes. Until you have focused, you haven’t sat down and asked in a quiet and friendly way what is really there. “Lazy” is only an external word, and insult. The word “lazy” says only that nothing important could be involved in how you feel. But your body knows why and how you are as you are, and some of that will turn out to be important if you will give it a friendly hearing.



An unfriendly hearing is one in which certain answers or all answers are rejected before they are even fully heard. It is the kind of hearing an angry teacher gives a disruptive child. It is the kind you have probably given yourself all too often:

“Well, what do you have to say for yourself? How do you explain this new mess you’ve gotten us into?”

“Well, I...”

“Shut up! I’ll tell you what your trouble is...”

The first movement of focusing is not like that. In this movement you smile at yourself, hold out your hand to yourself. “Hello, there,” you say. “How are you feeling now?” Having asked that question, you carefully avoid answering it.

The conscious mind will try to answer first. Set aside your mind’s glib and automatic ways of defining your problems, like “depressed,” “stressed about work,” “anxious about money,” “sad about my relationship,” “angry at my ex,” or “just tired.” Set aside the familiar mind chatter - it only keeps you going around in circles anyway.

Trust that your subconscious mind knows what the real problem is and that at a deeper level you have the real solutions to every problem. The core of your being is the place where all knowledge and wisdom reside because this is where your intelligence is connected with universal intelligence and all goodness - God.



SECOND MOVEMENT: FELT SENSE OF THE PROBLEM

Ask which problem feels the worst right now. Ask which one hurts the most, feels the heaviest, the biggest, the sharpest, the most prickly or clammy or sticky - the one that feels *bad* in whatever way you and your body define as “bad.” Or just choose one problem.

Now, don’t go inside the problem as you usually would. Stand back from it and sense how it makes you feel in your body when you think of it as a whole just for a moment. Ask, “What does this whole problem feel like?” But don’t answer in words. Feel the problem *whole*, the sense of *all that*.

In this second movement you will probably begin to encounter a lot of static from your mind; self-lectures, analytic theories, clichés, much squawking and jabbering. Somehow you must get down past all that noise to the felt sense underneath.

A MURAL OF THE WHOLE PROBLEM

Sometimes it helps to begin with an image and then find the felt sense. Imagine that your whole problem is a very large picture on a wide wall. You have to step back to see it all. Let such an image come, then attend in your body for what felt sense that image gives you.

WHEN WORDS GET IN THE WAY

When you have been living with a problem for a good deal of time, you have probably formed words to describe and explain the problem and you are probably stuck on those words. “I know what my problem about sex is. I’m scared of it. Just scared. I can feel it. What else is there to say?” Obviously nothing will shift if those words are always in the way. They are pessimistic words, denying the possibility of change. “This is the way I am,” the words say. “I was built this way, or my life has made me this way. I’m stuck here.” Let such words go by, ignore what you know and sense freshly to find what your body really feels. Take the feeling you have and let it broaden out into the felt sense of all that.

IF YOU AVOID YOUR FEELINGS

Some people find it difficult to make direct contact with their feelings. We are so accustomed to the simple patterns - if someone cheats us we are mad, if someone ignores us we are hurt - that many people don’t look beneath these simple patterns to their own unique complexity. It may seem to you that you are simply not very complicated inside, that you don’t have that complexity of feeling strands that I am describing here. But you do have it. You are human. It is there. It may just be a question of practice. Try for the next few days to identify and describe the sensations of your feelings as they go by.



Some people avoid their feelings because they think that there are scary things inside themselves. Nameless horrors and weird states are not lying there “inside” you, like poisonous snakes locked in a cage. You may say, “I don’t want to open the lid, I don’t want to let all that bad stuff come out.” The truth is that you are not a cage full of snakes. You are not any kind of container in which feelings writhe around with lives of their own. You are a process, and your feelings are part of that process.

It is partly a matter of getting yourself to shut up for a change, and listen, and feel. You can get good results by being patient. Let’s suppose the problem you are trying to focus on has to do with the souring of a once good relationship. As you try to feel the whole inner aura of the problem, the self-lectures may begin: “Here we go again, screwing up another good relationship. What’s the matter with me? No matter how good it is, I’ll always find some dumb way to make it bad.”

When that kind of noise begins, turn it off tolerantly and gently. Tell yourself, “Yes, yes, I know all that. I’ll listen some other time, if you like. Let’s set it aside for now.”

Be just as firm and polite if you find yourself trying to analyze the problem or trying to decide where the main drive of it lies. “Well, it’s obvious what’s gone wrong,” you’ll hear yourself say. “I’m basically scared of other people, so to cover it up I put up this big show. Like the other night when I...” Turn it off. Tell yourself, “Sure, you may be right about that. But right now we aren’t trying to figure anything out. What we’re trying to get at is *what does this whole thing feel like?*”

You are trying to get down to the single feeling that encompasses “*all that* about my relationship with...” or “*all that* about quitting my job.” the feeling contains many details, just as a piece of music contains many notes. A symphony, for instance, may last an hour or more and contain thousands of separate musical tones, sounded by many diverse instruments, in a multitude of combinations and progressions. But you don’t need to know all these details of its structure in order to feel it. If it is a symphony you know well, you only need to hear its name mentioned and feel the aura of it instantly. *That* symphony: the feel of it comes to you whole, without details.

You are trying to make contact with the felt sense of a problem in the same way. Let your sensing go inwardly down past all the details that can distract and sidetrack you, past all the squawking and jabbering, *until you feel the single great aura that encloses all of it.*



No, it isn't easy - not at first. It is partly a matter of knowing what to pay attention to, what to ignore. It is a matter of knowing how to set your mind so that it will be receptive to certain things happening inside but not to others.

In seeking the felt sense of a problem you are trying to make your mind do essentially what it does when calling up the feeling of your sense of a person. You may be aware of certain details but not snagged on them. Your attention is mainly on the single feeling, the sense of *all that*.

Once you have the feel of the whole problem, you stay with it for a while. Don't try to decide what is important about it. Don't try to decide anything. Just let it be, and be felt.

The felt sense is the holistic, unclear sense of the whole thing. It is something most people would pass by, because it is murky, fuzzy, vague. When you first stay with it, you might think, "Oh, *that*? You want me to stay with *that*? But that's just an uncomfortable nothing!" Yes, that is just how your body senses this problem, and at first that's quite fuzzy.



THIRD MOVEMENT: FINDING A HANDLE

What is the *quality* of the felt sense? Find a quality-word like "sticky," "heavy," "jumpy," "helpless," "tight," "burdened," or some word of that sort. Or a short phrase might fit: "like in a box," "have to perform." A combination of words might fit best, for example "scared-tight" or "jumpy-restless." Or a picture might pop up, which might get it best - for example, "a heavy leaden ball."

You aren't asking for analysis. What you are after is the core of the felt sense. You want the core of *all that*, the special quality that comes up from it.

This quality might be a sense of acting inappropriately, for example, or a sense of helplessness. Or it may feel oppressive, scary, tense, or uneasy - or there may be no word for it.

Once again, avoid forcing words into the felt sense. Let it come to you with its own essence. Or try one word gently.

In this third movement you may begin to find your problem changing. It may begin to feel different from what you expected before you started focusing: different from anything you might have figured out by rational means. The difference may be small and subtle and perhaps puzzling at first.

This is what you are looking for: something that comes along with a body shift. Discard everything else.

When a word or picture is right, we call it a "handle." As you say the words (or as you picture the image), the whole felt sense stirs just slightly and eases a little. This is a signal, as if it said: "This is right," just as in remembering something you forgot. The feeling of what you'd forgotten guides your remembering. You know that any number of perfectly sensible ideas are not part of the feeling, and you just drop them, until you get something the feeling itself opens up into.



It is like the old children's game of hide-and-seek. Someone who knows where the object of the search is hidden says "cold, colder, ice cold" when you move in the wrong direction, and "warm, warmer, still warmer" as you move in the right direction.

In this case it isn't another person but your own felt sense that will say "cold, cold, cold" (by not changing one bit) and then say "ah... warmer... hot! hot!" (by releasing, or shifting just slightly in how your body feels it).

Let words or pictures come from the feeling. Let it label itself: “scared,” “a stiff place inside me,” “a heavy feeling here,” “sticky,” “stuck,” “helpless,” “its like I’m frozen or burning up inside,” “clammy,” “prickly,” “like a sharp stab,” “limp,” “burdened,” “stinky-sour,” “jumpy-restless,” “like in a box,” or “like a heavy leaden ball.”

Usually, finding the right handle gives one only a small bodily shift, just enough so you can tell the handle is right. You will have to sense for this small shift, so that you don’t miss it. Your attention has to be in your body, to sense if this word, phrase, or picture makes that little relief in there that says, “It’s right. It fits.”



FOURTH MOVEMENT: RESONATING HANDLE AND FELT SENSE

Take the word or image you got from the third movement and check it against the felt sense. Make sure they click precisely into place - a perfect fit. Ask (but don’t answer): “Is that right?”

There should be a felt response, some deep breath inside, some felt release again, letting you know that the words are right.

Sometimes, instead, this confirming sensation - this feeling of *just right* - doesn’t come. then try to sense more accurately. Wait again and let more exact words come from this feeling.

To do this resonating, you must experience the felt sense again. You must touch it again as a feeling. Many people keep hold of a felt sense quite well until they get the very first words for it. Then, somehow, the feeling disappears and they have only the few words. If that happens, obviously you cannot check the words against the feeling directly. So you must let the felt sense come back - not necessarily the same feeling as it was, but the felt sense as it now is (perhaps a little changed). You say the words to yourself *gently* over and over, in the spirit of trying to feel directly what the words were about. Usually, after ten or twenty seconds, the feeling - as it is - is back.

It is all right if, of its own accord, the feeling changes, too, as you perform this matching procedure. Let both sides - the feeling and the words - do whatever they do, until they match just right.

When you get a perfect match, the words being just right for the feeling, let yourself feel that for a minute. You may feel impelled to say something like “Yes... oh yes... that’s right...” and just allow it to *be*.

It’s important to spend this minute. The sense of rightness is not only a check of the handle. It is your body just now changing. As long as it is still changing, releasing, processing, moving, let it do that. Give it the minute or two it needs to get all the release and change it wants to have at this point. Don’t rush on. You just got here.



FIFTH MOVEMENT: ASKING

If a big shift, an opening, and a bodily release have already come during the earlier movements, you go right to the sixth movement, receiving what has come along with the shift.

For example, you might have gotten such a shift and change in the problem already, when you sat quietly with the felt sense, sensing its crux and its quality. Or it might have come along with a handle with the felt sense.

But more usually a well-fitting handle gives you a little bit of a shift, just enough to know it is quite right. You feel its rightness several times over (resonating), until there has been all the bodily effect that this rightness can make. Now you need a shift, and there has not yet been one - at least not the kind that changes the problem.

Now comes the fifth movement, *asking*.

In this movement you ask the felt sense, directly, what it is. Usually this consists of *spending some time* (a minute or so, which seems very long) staying with the unclear felt sense, or returning to it again and again. The handle helps one do this.

You use the handle to help you to make the felt sense *vividly* present again and again. It isn't enough to remember how you felt it moments ago. It needs to be right here, otherwise you can't ask it. If you lose hold of it, present the handle to yourself and ask, "Is this still here?" After a few seconds it is there again (as before, or slightly changed).

Now you can ask *it* what it is.

For example, if your felt sense was "jumpy," say "jumpy" to yourself till the felt sense is vividly back, then ask *it*: "What is it about this whole problem that makes me so jumpy?"

If you hear a lot of fast answers in your head, just let that go by and then ask again. What comes swiftly is old information from your mind. At first the question to the felt sense may not get down to it, but the second or third time you ask, it will. The felt sense itself will stir, in answer, and from this stirring an answer will emerge.

You can tell the difference between the merely mental answers and those from the felt sense. The mental answers come very fast, and they are rapid trains of thought. The mind rushes in and leaves no space for you to contact the felt sense directly. You can let all that go by, and then recontact the felt sense, using the handle again. When the felt sense is back, you ask *it*.

One of the most important procedures in focusing is this asking of "open questions." You ask a question, but then you deliberately refrain from trying to answer it through any conscious thinking process.

People usually think they know the answers to such questions, or they decide what the answer should be. They ask themselves closed questions - in effect, rhetorical questions that they themselves answer immediately. Don't do that to your felt sense. Asking a felt sense is very much like asking another person a question. You ask the question, and *then you wait*.



There is a distinct difference between forcing words or images into a feeling and letting them flow *out* of it. When you force them into it, you effectively smother it and prevent it from showing its real nature. You tell it, “Oh, I already know what *you* are. There’s no sense wasting time on you.”

The words and images that flow out of a feeling, by contrast, are the kind that make a freshly felt difference. They are the kind that make you say, “Hey! Hey, yes, *that’s* what it’s all about!” These are the words and pictures that produce a body shift.

The body shift is mysterious in its effects. It always feels good, even when what has come to light may not make the problem look any better from a detached, rational point of view.

If the felt sense does not shift and answer right away, that is all right. Spend a minute or so with it. We do not control when a shift comes. (That is “grace.”) What is crucial is the time you spend sensing it (returning again and again to it). If you spend time sensing something unclear that is right there, meaningful, about this problem, and you don’t yet know what it is, then you are focusing.

Sometimes it helps to ask the following two questions; first try one, then later the other. With each you will need to make sure that the question reaches the felt sense. At first, usually, your mind will answer. Just repeat the question until the felt sense stirs.

1. “What is the worst of this?” (Or, “What is the ‘jumpyest’ thing about all this?” if your handle was “jumpy.”)



2. “What does the felt sense need?” (Or, “What would it take for this to feel OK?”)

If you have contacted the felt sense in the usual asking, and then have also asked these two questions in turn, and spent a minute or so sensing the unclear felt sense each time, it may be good to stop focusing for the moment.

Focusing is not work. It is a friendly time within your body. Approach the problem freshly later, or tomorrow.

SIXTH MOVEMENT: RECEIVING

Whatever comes in focusing, welcome it. Take the attitude that you are glad your body spoke to you, *whatever* it said to you. This is only one shift it is not the last word. If you are willing to receive this message in a friendly way, there will be another. If you will go this step of change, which is next now, there will be more change, whatever is next later.

You need not believe, agree with, or do what the felt sense just now says. You need only receive it. You will soon deeply experience that once what comes with a shift is received, another shift will come. What your body then says may be quite different. So permit it to tell you now whatever it must say first.



For example, with a shift you may get something you need to do, that is, a need from deep inside you. But the first form in which it comes might be quite impossible for you. It may seem to require that you leave your spouse and children and job, and besides it might require much money. It is very important to protect this first form, in which your life-direction can be sensed, even though it does not now meet these realistic questions. Your body is changing, your life-direction is appearing, this is only one step. Let the questions wait. You aren't going to go right out to do something wild. Keep that new sense of what would be a right direction and don't worry now about the form it will eventually take.

Allow even a very little shift to have its full minute or so. "All right, now at least I know where the trouble is," you may find with a momentary relief. Then the critical questions want to wipe it out very quickly. "Yes, but what good is it if I can't get it to change?" "Is this real? Maybe I'm fooling myself." "What if I don't get another shift after this?" Protect the shift that just came from all these negative voices. They may be right, but they have to wait. Don't let them dump a truckload of cement on this new green shoot that just came up.

It is time enough later to find out for sure if this step on the problem is real. Right now give it a space in which to breathe. Let it develop. Sense it. Be with it.

You may want to stop focusing after this, or you may go on. But don't rush on immediately. In a minute perhaps you will.

If you decide to stop, sense that you really can leave this place and return to it later. It is very much like a *place*, a spot in your landscape. Once you know where it is and how to find it, you can leave it and come back tomorrow.

Whatever comes in focusing will never overwhelm you if you can have the attitude we call "receiving." You welcome anything that comes with a body shift, but you stay a little distance from it. You are not *in* it, but *next to* it. This space, in which you can be next to it, forms in a few moments, as your body eases. "I can't solve this all in one day," you say to yourself. "I know it's there. I can find it again. I can leave it for a while." You are neither running away nor going into it. You get a breath. You sense that there is space between it and you. You are here, it is there. You *have* it, you *are* not it.

Or you can imagine a door between it and you, if you wish one. You have your hand on the doorknob, and you can open it a little whenever you want.



DO YOU WANT TO GO ANOTHER ROUND OF FOCUSING?

Sense if your body wants another round of focusing or to continue. Does it say, “Wait! I just got here, let me be here for a day or so. This feels new”? Or does it say, “Let’s not stop here, this isn’t a new place yet. I don’t want to be left here!”? Imagine going on and sense its reaction, then imagine stopping and sense its reaction.

If you stop, then first take a minute to be sure you can get back the step you just got on your problem. Usually it isn’t enough to remember the outcome. One remembers it later, but it may then lack the directly experienced realness it has now. It helps to recall what came just before the last shift. For example, suppose you had as a handle: an image of a ball of wool tightly bound, and from asking what made that, your good shift came and moved your problem one step toward solution. You would remember not only that step itself but also what immediately preceded the shift. That helps, later on, when you recall the step, to get it back with full bodily realness. From the preceding image it will come back fully again. It helps to find this before stopping.



To go another round of focusing, you might freshly sense the whole problem, and ask your body, “Is it all solved?” The discomfort of what is still unresolved will then come definitely *in your body*, if you await it there. You would stay with this whole felt sense and go through the movements 2-6 as before.

Or you might go on from your last shift, from what came with it, by getting under *that*. “What now is the whole sense of *that*?”

As understanding and gentle and accepting as you were for that quiet minute, now you also want *further* change. By being gentle and understanding, by appreciating this feeling, you prepared the ground for that further change. To move into further change, you begin again with the second movement: get the felt sense that is under or beyond whatever body-message you just received.

Suppose, for example, that in the last round what emerged was that you feel “helpless,” and you had a shift around, “Oh, that’s what I’ve been feeling, and I’m so jumpy all the time from feeling that it will come to a crunch, and I’m really helpless!”

Now, to go another round, you ask yourself: “What is that whole felt sense, *all that* about helplessness?”

Ask - and don’t answer. Let the feeling deepen itself. “Helpless: is still the right word, but it is now the word only for the tip of the iceberg. You can begin to feel its bulk beneath the word. All that - quite a lot - is involved in the whole bulk. Again, the third movement: you try to sense the quality of this new, wider felt sense.

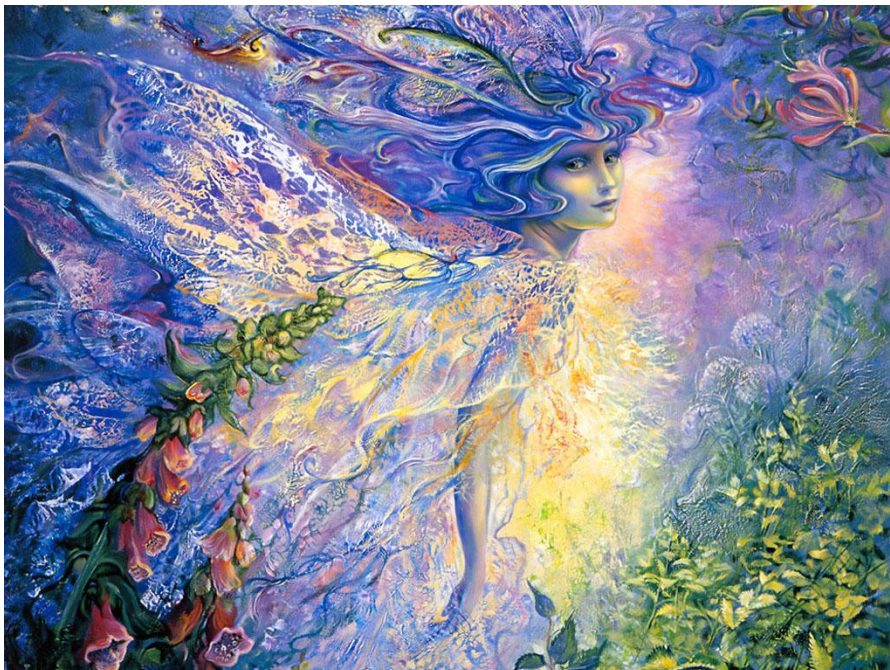
Whenever words come, you check them against the felt sense. If they make no difference there, you let them go by and you return to the felt sense.

A shift feels like a release. That is how you recognize it. It may come at any time during any of the focusing movements. If that happens, welcome it. Also, some of the movements may happen simultaneously. These instructions deal not with a mechanical process but with a human one.

There may be many such cycles or steps before a given problem feels resolved. You feel a body shift with each step.

It often isn’t possible to deal fully with a given problem in one focusing session. A dozen steps may be necessary, maybe even a hundred, before the problem feels resolved. The process may take many months. You continue with each session until, simply, you feel you have had enough for the day. You reach a point where you say, “Well, I haven’t yet beaten this problem yet, but I’m at a stopping place that feels pretty good. I need a day to let my body live with this much changed, and perhaps also to go out into the world and see what happens.” Steps of focusing and steps of outward action often alternate. Each aids the other.

Don’t get discouraged if focusing doesn’t give you dramatic results the first time you try it. Like any other skill, it requires practice. Also, it requires you to overcome certain deeply ingrained habits of mind and body, certain too-familiar ways of talking to yourself and at yourself.



**FOCUSING
SHORT FORM**

FIRST MOVEMENT: CLEAR A SPACE

How are you?

What's between you and feeling fine?

Don't answer; let what comes in your body do the answering.

Don't go into anything.

Greet each concern that comes.

Put each aside for a while, next to you.

Except for that, are you fine?

SECOND MOVEMENT: FELT SENSE

Pick one problem to focus on.

Don't go into the problem.

What do you sense in your body when you recall the whole of that problem?

Sense all of that, the sense of the whole thing, the murky discomfort
or the unclear body-sense of it.

THIRD MOVEMENT: GET A HANDLE

What is the quality of the felt sense?

What one word, phrase, or image comes to mind out of the felt sense?

What quality-word would fit it better?

FOURTH MOVEMENT: RESONATE

Go back and forth between the word (or image) and the felt sense.

Is that right?

If they match, have the sensation of matching several times.

If the felt sense changes, follow it with your attention.

When you get a perfect match, the words (images) being just right for the feeling,
let yourself feel that for a minute.

FIFTH MOVEMENT: ASK

What is it about the whole problem that makes me so...?

When stuck, ask questions:

What is the worst of this feeling?

What's really so bad about this?

What does it need?

What should happen?

Don't answer; wait for the feeling to stir and give you an answer.

What would it feel like if it was OK?

Let the body answer:

What is in the way of that?

SIXTH MOVEMENT: RECEIVE

Welcome what came. Be glad it spoke.

It is only one step on the problem, not the last.

Now that you know where it is, you can leave it and come back to it later.

Protect it from critical voices that interrupt.

Does your body want another round of focusing,
or is this a good stopping place?