

Mary Hendricks-Gendlin, Ph.D. (Director, The Focusing Institute)

## Focusing as a Force for Peace: The Revolutionary Pause

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Focusing is a force for peace because it frees people from being manipulated by external authority, cultural roles, ideologies and the internal oppression of self attacking and shame. This freeing has to do with an ability to pause the on-going situation and create a space in which a felt sense can form.

When we know how to focus we refuse to take ourselves or any other person as merely an instance of a culturally defined category or group. We don't say, "I am good, you are bad." Or, "I am a wife and mother" as though this defined the total of who I am. Or "You are the doctor, I am the patient" as though our interaction would then be governed only by the meanings of those roles. Or "I am a Christian or a Muslim" as though the ritual forms would then exhaustively define my spiritual life. We know there is always a rich detailed intricacy, a "more" in each person's experience.

I will tell you a story about pausing the cultural role level of a situation so that a felt sense can form. You will see that this pausing allows "the patient" to break the culturally expected role behavior of unquestioned acceptance of the external authority of "the doctor."

### Example

At 1:23 on a Saturday afternoon a perfect baby girl was born to her parents after a short, uncomplicated labor. She was born in a birthing room at a modern suburban hospital in mid America. Her mother and she being free of drugs took a long deep look at each other, bonding for life.

The father rushed back to work to conclude a large presentation. The pediatrician the family had selected was not on call. His partner filled in. The mother was told by a nurse, "The baby is a bit jaundiced. The doctor wants you to stay overnight in the hospital so we can keep an eye on her."

Upstairs on the ward, a few hours later, a technician came into the room and took several vials of blood from the baby's heel. The baby cried out each time.

A few hours later, another technician appeared, needle and vial in hand.

Mother: "What are you doing?"

Technician: "We need to take blood for some tests."

Mother, "**Wait a minute. Stop.** You just took her blood." What is this test for?"

Technician: "To check on the jaundice. "

Mother: "**Wait. I need to think about this. (She is quiet for a minute.)** If the results of this test are positive, then what follows from that?"

Technician: "Then we wait twelve hours and repeat the test."

Mother: "Humm. **(Quiet again)** So why do we need to do the test now, if the only result is that you wait 12 hours and repeat it.?"

Technician: "To keep track of what is going on."

Mother: "We will wait twelve hours and then I will consider whether to do the test then."

Technician: "But the doctor ordered it now."

Mother: "I'm sorry, you do not have my permission to do any more tests on my baby."

An uproar ensued. The mother, quite tired from having just given birth and trying to learn how to breast feed her baby, was visited by a stream of technicians, floor nurses and others. Most said, "You should do what the doctor orders!" A few said, "Good for you. You do what seems right to you."

At about 9 pm the pediatrician called the mother in her room.

Doctor: "If you don't have the tests I ordered, then I cannot be responsible for your baby."

Mother: "I agree. You are no longer responsible for her. I no longer wish to work with you."

The mother called another pediatrician who came early the next morning, examined the baby and said, "She is fine. You can go home." As the family prepared to leave, one of the nurses said, "Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ is doing research on jaundice in babies. He does blood tests on all the babies, for his research."

Twenty years later the New York Times reported findings that the threshold for pain is lower in adults who had physical pain as babies. Both parents were glad they had minimized the pain experienced by their child on the day of her birth.

### TAE process on "Wait a minute"

What was I doing when I said to the technician, "Wait a minute. Stop" I was pausing the on-going situation, making a pause in which I could let my bodily felt sense of the **whole** situation form. If I had simply responded as expected and said, "Yes doctor" then the situation would have carried forward, but only from **within** the routine pattern. By pausing the routine, I am able to form a sense of the whole, entire situation, not just behave from within the expected pattern. It was a quite complex situation and I needed to have all of it functioning so that I could make good choices. I had to weigh my ignorance of the medical side, the authority of the doctor's opinion, my own sense of my baby, my knowledge that routines govern much that goes on in Institutions, possible danger to my child if tests were not done. I knew I needed more information and I knew that I needed to understand the situation better before deciding what to do.

Notice this odd phrasing in what I just said above: "I stopped the situation so I could get a sense of the situation. What does this mean? And why was I able to do this? It is because I deeply know something here-- That it is one of my deepest rights as a human being to free myself from any situation so I can form my sense of it. This is the kind of knowing that is a good start for a TAE process. There is something I know which I can not yet say in any expanded way. A first sentence to say what I know is:

When a person can pause and go inside and say what is "**my sense**" of this situation, that is the thing that makes them less vulnerable to oppression.

Then I would underline "pause" and "my sense" and ask what I actually mean by these words.

I did a brief TAE process which I won't go over here except to say my "odd" sentences that I ended up with in later steps.

- When people are distinct from any other entity in their robust body, then they are less susceptible to oppression.
- The person who says "my sense" is discovered in the pausing and separating.
- Separating from the situation lets me have my sense of the situation
- When people separate from situations and find their robust body, they're less susceptible to being lost in 'we' groupings or attributed generalities.
- Situations are inherently such that you must leave them in order to have a sense of them.

To explain how important this pause is, we can go to *A Process Model*, in which the generative power of pausing is philosophically derived. I will give you a very simple outline.

#### *A Process Model Treatment of Pausing in order to form a felt sense*

In *A Process Model* there are at least three levels of "feeling" defined:

- feelings-in-behavior;
- culturally slotted emotions
- a felt sense.

I will explain and give some examples of the differences between these levels.

Emotions are instinct and culture bound

Any action (and, in animals, any behavior) involves feeling, but not as a separate sequence. Any action or interaction is a carrying forward of the body and so we feel our actions. I call such feelings the "in-behavior" or "in-action" type. (PM)

Animals as well as humans have on-going sentient experience of themselves in their environments, which includes their particular histories (e.g. knowing where the food is, liking to curl up next to their favorite human when he sits on the couch, knowing exactly how he likes it--not to climb on his lap but to sit with just the paws on his lap.) But they do not make an inner datum of this on-going sentience, as such. In addition to this sentience, animals also have a kind of "emotion." Animal "emotions" are part of a fixed action pattern. If the cat is peacefully lying in the sun, comfortable in its known environment and a dog or strange cat suddenly enters the door, this wider sentience dramatically narrows. The tail puffs and attention is narrowed upon just that event. Everything else disappears. In animals "emotions" are part of "fixed action patterns." Fixed action patterns are studied in a branch of animal psychology called Ethology. Ethologists say that behavior is "built into" the body.

In animals an emotion is a behavior in response to an immediate situation, not an internal entity. The cat does not puff its tail by thinking about a situation or because he sees a picture of another cat. His tail only puffs when the strange cat is present. Emotions are present in behavior. If animals could make an inner datum out of fixed action patterns they would have emotions as we do. If they could made an inner datum out of the whole on going sentience of the situation in which the other cat appeared, they would be able to have a felt sense.

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In contrast to animals, humans can have both emotions and a felt sense as an inner datum, without the situation being literally present. The basic sensing of our sentient tissue process and behavior becomes an inner datum through a process called "versioning." Versioning happens when there is a **pausing of behavior**. In the pause we get a version of the whole situation. We "have," "feel," the whole situation, because it is on-going in our body, but without the kind of change that the usual next behavior would make. The usual behaving changes the situation. When the usual behavior is paused, we get a symbolic or patterned version of the situation. Symbolic means a "doubled" kind of behavior sequence. A behavior makes a difference in both the literal physical situation and in a non-literal situation. For example, when you are asked to vote by show of hands in a crowded room, then the behavior of raising your arm is **both** voting and it is also being careful not to hit the person next to you as you raise your arm. Both are changes in the situation, but not in the same way. The change that voting makes is not visible here now behaviorally. The "voting" arm raising is not behavior in the physical situation. You don't affect the situation with your arm, as you would by hitting someone. One sequence is both symbolic and literal. It is doubled.

Such "doubled" or symbolic sequences are culturally elaborated in humans. We might say that **emotions in humans are culturally elaborated fixed action patterns**. Emotions arise at certain cultural junctures, when particular behavior sequences and expectations occur. For example, in a culture in which disrespect is shown in certain ways, the emotion of anger arises if that behavior occurs. Or if status is conferred by certain accomplishments then pride or shame occur around acquiring or failing in these accomplishments. Our bodily living consists of situations or "stories," and at specific junctures **within** the stories we feel certain emotions. Culture is the known routine actions and feelings which a situation consists of. Culture belongs "to all of us within the community." Every culture offers a number of different ways one can respond and feel in a situation, but each of these ways would be recognized by other members of the culture as familiar. If people don't feel and respond in the expected way, culture is said to break down. When X situation occurs we are supposed to feel Y emotion and something is strange about us if we don't. We are not supposed to be able to individually version culture further.

The capacity to have a symbolic or patterned sequence allows the formation of language and with language comes the capacity to have "kinds". For humans there is such a thing as "a tree" not just this tree which is shading us from the burning sun right now. Proto humans could make a "tool" on the spot to kill this deer for food, but they could not think about the next hunt and take the tool with them.

For instance, having made hunting tools, and used them, on the way home there was no way to feel and have the next hunt, so that one would still recognize the tools, as such. To do that would be to see the tools as universals, as that kind of thing, as belonging to that kind of context, and there was no way to have kinds. (PM)

Culture is "kinds" or patterns of interaction.

Situations are kinds (they are "kinded"), created by versioning, that is to say as instances of a collected context. A human is a mother, a son, a ruler, a peasant, a man.

**The first kinds are "archetypes," original kinds, types of interaction contexts. In these the people acquire role-identities, not as single individuals but in context with each other. And, of course, these are structures of interactions with each other, that is to say they are situational structures: the**

**ways a husband acts in relation to a wife, a younger person toward an elder, a wife's brother to a husband, etc. (PM pg 210)**

A felt sense is a bodily sense of how the whole wider situation is for us

A felt sense develops after language and culture and emotions. All individuals have many strands of experience which could be differentiated and which do not fit the cultural patterns. But to allow the whole of this on-going experience to form as a bodily felt sense one has to pause the cultural story. This is still somewhat new for most people. If we ask a client who is upset about his son's divorce, what that "whole upsetness" is about, or what it is like, or what is in it, he is likely to reply, almost indignantly, "What do you mean? Wouldn't you feel upset!" All humans pause at culturally structured spots and have emotions. But instead of feeling only what one is supposed to feel within the cultural situation, one can have in one implicit sense the whole situation, -- the bodily lived history of what lead up to this moment, what one is going to do next, many other situations one is involved in, a vast mesh of experience functioning implicitly to form this felt sense right now. The felt sense is the inner datum of "how this whole situation is for me." This is wider than what a typical acculturated person feels.

The process of forming a felt sense and allowing it to explicate is a new kind of sequence which involves pausing the usual behaving and feeling. In their being paused a versioning (felt sense) of the whole context can occur. When the dancer Isadora Duncan choreographed a new dance, she would stand in the middle of her studio and not move for a long time. From the outside it looked as if she were not doing anything. But inside she was pausing the usual behaving and was allowing a felt sense to form of what she wanted to create. She was engaged in a zig zag process between her attention and the forming felt sense of the new dance.

In our new kind of sequence the move she makes toward the as yet vague feel has an effect on this feel which in turn affects the next move that arises from her body. Only now these moves are not dance steps, not words or images, but her interaction with this feel, her pointing or pursuing or waiting for. And the new environmental changes are changes in this "feel." In this way, the new sequence is a string of changes in the whole context, a kind of change in this whole which could not be made by dancing.

But in the sense of VII the situation throughout remains the same. It is this relevance, this sense of being about to dance, which remains unchanged in the VII way, that is, she is still not dancing. She is still waiting. The same VII situation waits, and is paused. The VIII sequence changes in a new way what stays the same in a VII way.

Each new whole is thus a version of "the same" dance situation, in the sense of VII. As with other new kinds of sequence that we developed in earlier chapters, our new sequence here consists of a string of versions of the same, paused, earlier context.

From this sequence of versions, something quite new falls out. As always in our scheme, the had feeling or object falls out from the string of versions. That's what "a feeling" always is. It is the carrying forward continuity of the series of body-states, the changing which we sense as "a" feeling (and we can only sense over time.)<sup>1</sup>

It is important to emphasize that the new sequence does not begin with the direct referent. It does not wait there, to be noticed or interacted with. Rather, the direct referent is a datum, a new kind of object, which forms, falls out from the sequence.

The sequence begins with looking for, letting come, waiting for... what is not yet "there." And where does one look and let? That space too is new, and is generated. As

one looks, so to speak, in the usual body-sentience, this looking finds itself carried forward by a change in a somewhat different space.

While the changes in our new sequence may seem slight, they are actually each an enormous change...It is a new kind of source. There is ... act of the VII type, which could make that much change. After each bit of such change, everything is different. Each bit is a new whole, a changed whole. The whole dance and all speech or action which would arise would be different than would arise from the last bit.

I have already distinguished this new kind of "feel" from emotions or slotted feelings. These familiar feelings also make change, of course. What one would say or do after such a feeling comes is different than before. But they are within the whole context. Our new sequence consists of changes of the whole. (PM Chapter VIII)

The reason the distinction between an emotion and a felt sense is so important is that when one can form a felt sense of the whole situation, new possibilities for carrying forward are implicit that do not exist from within the usual cultural-emotion sequences.

Culture was a huge development, but when people are grouped into "kinds" it brings the potential for a new level of violence. When people differentiate their felt sense of some situation, they create a field of new distinctions that are at a different level than the general or cultural categories. Hearing someone speak from this felt sense level, one has a different felt response than when responding to idealogical, normative or cultural categories. As focusers listening to someone speak from a felt sense we often don't even perceive "a husband" or "an Irishman". We feel this particular human being here-- this Being right this minute who looks out at us from inside—who is not exactly equated with any particular content because there is always a "for further" going on. When we hear someone from their intricacy, we don't feel like killing or hurting them. We spontaneously feel a deep connection and a valuing of the person. This connection is the basis of conflict mediation that we know about. We have something to contribute to peace.

The usual, culturally patterned interactions would not continue on their regular way if one of the participants failed to have the "slotted" feeling. If you do not feel respect for the saint, chagrin when called to order by the authorities, pleased when given a gift, (and so on,) the culturally structured interactions would then fail to work, to continue as usual. PM

We know how to help people "not continue on their regular way and yet respect the cultural and other differences between people. Here is an example from our discussion list recently. Notice the pausing and waiting and body sense forming.

**Yasmine: I am interested in being a "Moslim Focuser". I just need a little guidance. I am attending the once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca next week (3 million Moslims gather there for about 7 days in what is supposed to be a deeply spiritual experience) and it would really be great to incorporate focusing. I know this is probably a personal thing, but any suggestions are welcome. I am sorry if all this sounds naive for the level of discussion on this forum, but you touched a cord and I felt I had to respond .**

**Rob:** What is Focusing about, you say?

When you go on Hajj, will you not be **stopping** (often): actively **sensing into your body**, to see how the journey is carrying you?

Before you go, will you not be **listening within** your self for everything which comes between you and being at peace with life, and

with all sentient beings?

When you put on the simple clothes which the dead wear, will you not **feel in your body** something of your own fears and uncertainties about death and mortality?

When you take off your usual clothes, you put on the same simple dress as everybody else is wearing. Will you not be **noticing how** the radical equality of all believers **affects your heart**?

When you leave your ordinary life behind, will you not want to **notice freshly** what this experience of simplicity is teaching you?

During the several days, will you not be asking something like, "What are my true values?" - and **waiting (without pre-judgment) for the heart to respond**?

Will you not be **sensing in your body** some feeling of the history and tradition, of which these places are the embodiment?

Will you not be **sensing something of the meaning** of sacrifice? of the meaning of ritual actions? of the meaning of home?

I imagine that **at every point, you will need time** .... Not just to stop and feel a sense of meaning: but to **let steps come** from that sense of meaning.... You will, I feel sure, be **making a space into which new understandings can emerge** ....

**So you will need time.** Time to be quiet and alone. **Time to let go of the known** (the defined thought). **Time to be quiet with the unknown (that which is not yet formed, and can only, obscurely, be felt)?**

When you return, may you not find in your body (five times a day), a new feeling of meaning and significance, as you face towards the Kaaba?

I imagine that in the context of the Hajj, Focusing may look something like what I have tried to describe. You will have to see for yourself.

#### **Yasmine:**

What you have written has touched me and my husband in a profound and beautiful way. You gave new spiritual dimension to a ritual that had become very indoctrinated in narrow interpretations. Many Moslems are seeking a more tolerant and universal interpretation of **Islamic** dogma. As I write this my thirteen years old son is asking me if I have a problem with **Islam** because he has a problem with many of the things he reads or is being taught at school. It will require tremendous courage to re-examine traditional values and beliefs that have been passed down to us, it will take special courage at times like these to talk about love and tolerance and new understanding, when many Moslems feel a need for blind loyalty because of the many discriminating, hateful and racial attacks experienced by Moslems lately. Thank you again Rob. We will pray for you and for peace and love for all mankind.

The felt sense level implies a new ethics

**Emotions are a narrowing of the body sentience of the whole situation.** They prevent us from being aware of the whole situation. We all know the injunction when we are angry to

“count to ten” before acting. This is because we are likely to ignore many aspects of the situation while we are angry and say things we will later wish we had not said. This is the popular understanding that emotions narrow our sense of the whole situation. **Because it is part of the cultural pattern itself, feeling an emotion cannot change the pattern which gives rise to it.** If we feel anger at an insult made to us in public and yell back, we may alter the situation by our yelling, but we do not alter the pattern that engenders the yelling in us. If the same insult in public occurs again, we again are enraged at it. **Emotion is a huge change in our bodies and may also change the situations, but it is not a change in the pattern. Rather it is a change in us and in our behavior which the pattern itself prescribes.**

**As our practice of Focusing deepens, we make this discrimination more and more between what is an emotional, culturally determined response and what is from the wider sensing of the whole from which a right next step may come. We become reluctant to act in relation to another person from the cultural level if it would violate the particularness of “this person in there.”**

**The Rwandan genocide, in which 800,000 people were killed in 8 days, was carefully and methodically prepared for some years in advance by a systematic campaign of defining people in groups and assigning emotions to go along with groups.**

**Each time we help someone find the capacity to pause and form a felt sense we increase the ability to think for oneself, and to not be emotionally manipulated by ideologies and rhetoric like “the Axis of Evil.”**

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