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Focusing and Somatic Diseases

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During focusing we can frequently feel a pain in our body. Then we focus our attention on this pain to find out what happens. The pain is a handle of the felt sense. That's what happens with focusing.

However as a doctor I see patients every day with pain in their bodies without any idea about focusing. As a doctor I examine him to make a diagnosis. I am a doctor and a psychotherapist too, so I have combined my knowledge about diseases and focusing and I have started to treat many somatic diseases, especially chronic diseases with focusing. But before I will explain to you how to do it and how it is working, I like to try a short focusing-process with you about a pain, either one that you have just now or you have recurrent or a pain which is gone, but which you can remember well. It can be a pain, also an itchiness or weakness in your body. I will refer to all these discomforts as pain.

1 Instruction for a process

And now please close your eyes and focus your attention on your feet, that you can feel them well. Make sure your feet have good contact with the floor. Then focus your attention on your legs and slowly upward to your back. Then over your shoulders to the chest. Now you can feel your breathing and the space inside for breathing. The space inside can include now also the area from the abdomen to the pelvis. When you can feel now what your inner space is, then feel again your pain, what you have at the moment or recurrently and focus your attention on the place of this pain.

Please feel the pain in your body and stay with it. Look for a word that fits your feeling. Or is there an image arising from the place of your pain? Follow this image that is developing.

Please look, what an emotion goes together with this word or image.

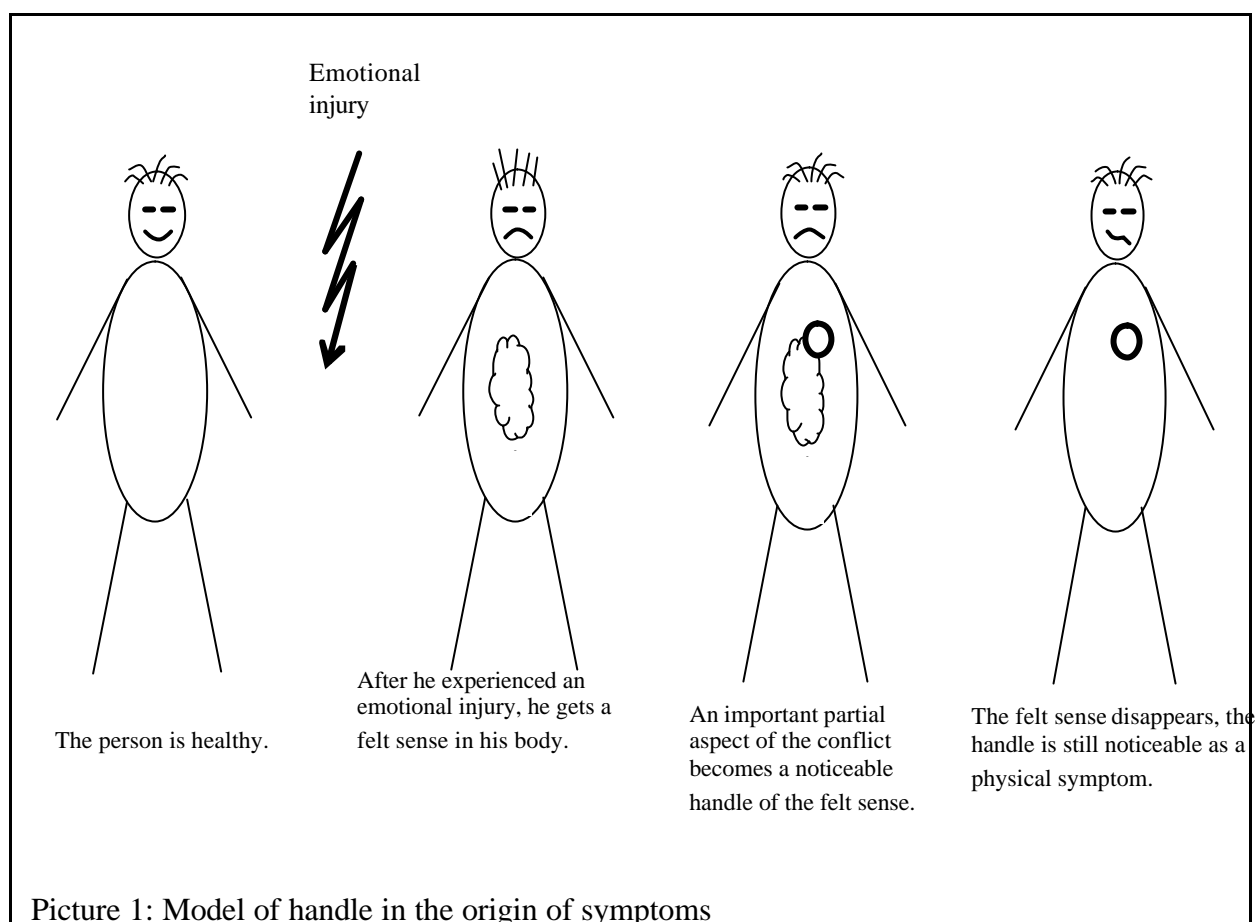
And now please ask yourself, what are the needs of this painful place in your body or what can improve this place or image. What is helpful?

Have a look, if you can find a personal problem behind your pain.

Now have a look, if it might be helpful for it too, what you have discovered before as help.

And now we finish our exercise. Take your time to come back to our group here. And now remember once more your pain, the special word or images and what was helpful for it.

I hope you have seen a connection between your pain and your personal conflict you may have. Please remember your own pain as an example in the next hour, when I will give you some explanations.



You know very well the felt sense and you remember that it has handles. You can feel the felt sense more or less in the whole body between throat and belly. There are places or even spots which you can feel more intense than other places. These places we call handles. Now remember again our exercise before. You felt a pain in your body. I mean, that each painful place in the body is a handle of any felt sense, which you can feel permanently, because it is very strong and permanent. But what is so strong and permanent? So strong and permanent is a part of a strong and permanent conflict.

Now we return again to normal focusing-processes. Most of the time, there is some conflict. After relaxation we can feel the felt sense fitting this conflict. The felt sense is an uncertain feeling, but it has one or more handles which we can feel well. During focusing we work with this handles or the handles are working themselves, whatever you prefer. But it is clear, that the handles are special aspects of a conflict.

My hypothesis is now, that **any pain in the body is just the handle of any felt sense, related to a special conflict.** But it is a strong and permanent unsolved aspect of this conflict.

Please remember again now your own process before. What did you find? Which special word or image? Is it part of a conflict?

2 The perception of felt sense

A person is worried about his problem. When he is thinking about it, then he has a felt sense in his body about his problem too, even when he doesn't notice it. In my opinion we always have physical sensations to everything we are thinking about, but we notice them only during relaxation and with increased attention for them, e.g. during focusing. Only when a problem

is very big and permanent, then the physical sensations are very intense and become noticeable even without relaxation and special attention.

Not all parts of the problem are unsolvable. Only some of them are serious. These are then the most intense parts of the felt sense called handles. Handles are places or even spots in the body, where we can feel anything very intense, a pain, heat, cramps and so on. When the person finds a solution for his problem, then the felt sense with its handles can disappear. Or most of the time one handle disappears first, then another. Or the handles change form, intensity or position.

When the person cannot find a solution for his problem, it becomes chronic. And the equivalent of the unsolvable parts of the chronic problem is the handles of the felt sense in the body. So the hurt person will feel **these handles as physical symptoms**. Typical symptoms or a combination of typical symptoms are then the known diseases, how they are described in the medical textbooks.

3 Basic conflicts

You could object now, that the problems of people are so different and numerous like as the people are different. But many diseases have a typical symptomatology. That is why we can reduce most of problems to some typical basic human problems, e.g. the conflict between tendencies to more autonomy and the wish to be dependent on some one. Both these intentions are working in all of us, and they are not consistent. Many people have problems with this. It can be the reason for a chronic conflict, which is mostly compensated. But when something happens, what makes this conflict topical, then the conflict is increasing.

For example a man loves his son very much, and the boy was always a well-behaved until the beginning of puberty. Suddenly there are arguments, but the father is still looking for this depending love of his son like it was before. Now he is in danger to get a gastritis. Why?

4 Example of gastritis and the regulation of organs

The beginning of all symptoms are alterations of a function of an organ. There are cells e.g. in the stomach producing gastric acid. Normally the production starts, to prepare digestion, when a person starts to eat. The acid is then bound immediately by food, so there is no free acid. When you are very hungry and you are expecting food soon, then the production of gastric acid can already start before intake of food, preparing the process. The acid will be bound then a short time after, when the eating begins.

Unfortunately there are also situations, when somebody is expecting his food and his production of gastric acid has already started, but then he doesn't get the expected food. Then he has free acid in his stomach. This is dangerous for the cells of its surface, which will be irritated by the acid. The body starts now processes to improve the situation, f.e. the circulation of blood is increasing to cure this place of irritation. The result is a redness of this area, which we can see during gastroscopy. But the increased circulation is not always sufficient enough. Then some cells will be destroyed by the acid, this means, there is a small hole in the surface called ulcer. The role of Helicobacter is in my opinion only an additional effect dependent on a local immune deficiency. I repeat: The first step was only a functional alteration – the increased production of gastric acid. Only the second step is the destruction of cells.

Until now I have spoken only about hunger for food. But a hunger for love is possible too with the same effects. F.e. the man with his son in puberty: He is looking for the love of the boy like food. And his stomach starts to produce gastric acid. But the love of the son doesn't come anymore as expected. So the free acid rests in the stomach and can irritate the surface. This free acid can be bound by food or by love. But when the man doesn't get it, than he will get gastritis with the symptoms of epigastric pain and nausea.

The body has only one answer to hunger expecting a fast feeding – the production of gastric acid. The reason can be hunger for food or for love. It means somatic or emotional reasons can be responsible for the same reaction of any organ. The organs in the body react

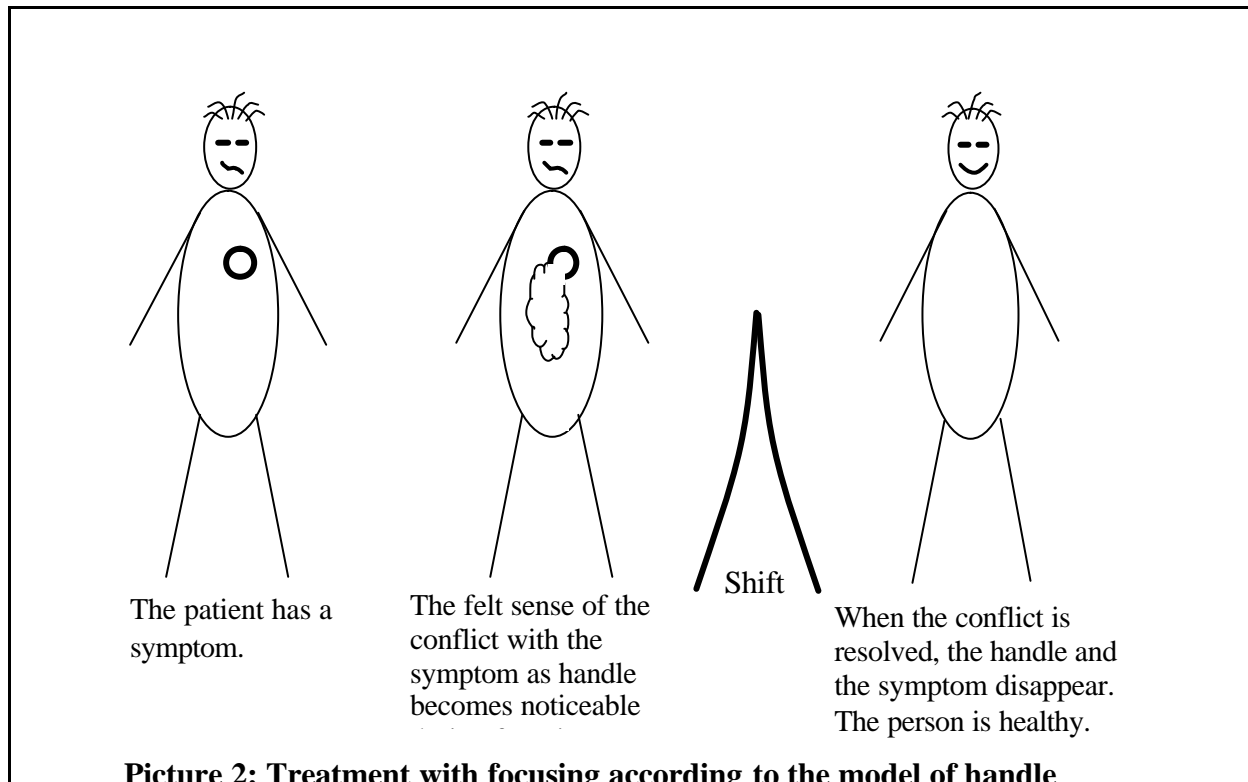
in only one way. These reactions are controlled by the vegetative nervous system, and this is regulated by the **hypothalamus**. The hypothalamus gets order from other parts of the brain, especially the hippocampus and the brainstem. The pathological symptom originates from any irritation of an organ, emotional or physical, a lack of food or love for example. When something is lacking again and again, then a frequent irritation is the result and the time between is no longer sufficient for recovery, f.e. for the mucous membrane of stomach. So the defect becomes chronic and the patient has a chronic gastritis.

5 Treatment

Now to the possibilities of treatment. The doctor will give medication to stop the production of gastric acid. That is effective. But when the patient stops to take the tablets, then he will get the symptoms again, when the conflict is persistent, when he has still his hunger for love. To change his view of his son he needs a psychological treatment. He must learn, that the son is no longer the small boy loving him from a depending position, but a young man with his own ideas.

As a doctor I see the patient with gastritis, but he doesn't realize the reason. But as his focusing-therapist I don't need to know it, because **I can use the symptom to find out it**. I start with his symptom, his epigastric pain. I am sure, that he will find out the connection of his problem to his son or more generally to his hunger for love. The symptom symbolizes one aspect of his general problem. Let him do focusing and find out, what is needed for improvement. So he will find his personal way of solving his conflict.

Please look at picture 2: The person has at first a symptom of a disease. During focusing he can feel the whole felt sense of the problem. The conflict will change after the felt shift, the view or behavior of the person changes too. Then the symptom can change too. It is reduced or resolved.



6 The model of maps

Let me tell you a little story about my grandson, when he was 2 years old. We were playing with Lego bricks. He made towers of the bricks and I always told him the colour of the brick which he was just touching. At last he made a tower with red bricks only and said with each new brick: "Another red one!" After that we went shopping. I showed him a red car on the road. Later on, when a red car was passing, he told me: "Another red one!" . And there were many red cars!

At this time he learnt the category of the colour red. At first there were only red bricks, then also cars, later on red T-shirts, roofs or flowers. What is the **process of learning**? In order to understand this we can use the model of maps. This model was born in 1948 by Tolman and further developed in 1992 by Edelman. The model of maps describes the process of learning as mapping in the brain. We compile a map about every issue. The issue can be a category like the category "things with red color" in the small story about my grandson. We have separate maps about every person, every thing, and every abstract term. All about this person or thing or term is written on this map. The maps are stored in the cortex in the temporal and parietal lobe. The total of maps is called **memory**. On a map there is more than a collection of facts. There are also always emotions with. Remember my grandson, when he was mapping the category red. He had emotions too during our play with the bricks or later on, when we saw the red cars. He made an **experience** with red bricks and cars. The keeping of the **emotions** takes place in another part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex.. Emotions give the shade or coloring to the maps of facts. The emotions depend on the situation and especially on the assessment of the situation. The assessment depends on previous experiences. When a map of a similar situation exists, then the new impression is compared with the older map. The new fact must be integrated into the old map or the old one must be changed.

In a physiological view the maps are groups of neurons, which are joint by synapses. These neurons are in the cortex, where the long-term memory is placed. It is a life-long process of supplementing and correcting all our maps in the brain.

When I remember a fact, so I remember the whole map around it. The whole map is activated. But not all facts are always conscious. It is more like "all about something", how you watch a normal map. You don't see all the details. For the activation of memory we use the **hippocampus**, a small part of the brain, which is very important for memory and learning. A process of learning is in the model of maps an installation of a new map or supplementing or correcting an existing map.

When I remember something, then the map of it arrives at my hippocampus together with the remembered emotions. The hippocampus is very closely connected with the hypothalamus and passes information on to it. My hypothesis is that **in the hypothalamus the map is translated into physical reactions of organs** in the body. The hypothalamus is the centre for regulating the vegetative nervous system, for the hormones and the immune system. The hypothalamus sends the signals with the vegetative nerves and the bloodstream into the body, especially to the organs of the chest, abdomen and pelvis. These organs react to the signals and change their functions. For example the cells in the stomach produce more gastric acid.

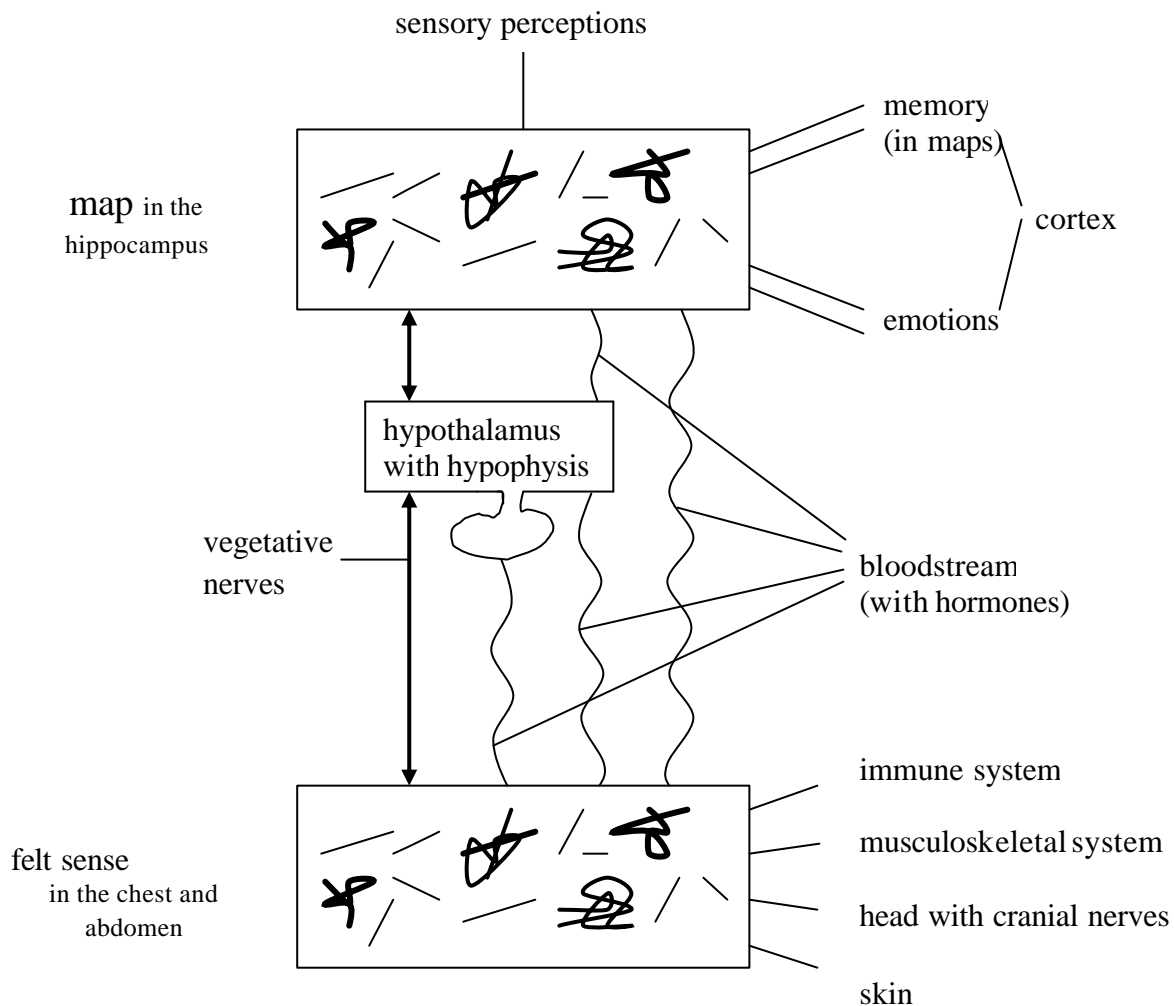
Another example would be an increased circulation of blood anywhere in the abdomen, which we can feel as a warm area inside. These changes we can feel in our body, when we focus our attention on it during focusing. Then we can feel **the whole map as felt sense** with some tops as handles. In the map and in the felt sense there is "all about this person, this thing or term". In the felt sense emotions are included. The felt sense is an uncertain feeling, like we don't see all details on the map, when we are looking at it. Only the handles we feel more intense. These are correlated to some tops on this map.

During focusing the sensations or images inside will change. These changes are sent back to the hippocampus on the same way, using the vegetative nerves and the bloodstream. It is a response of the body to the brain. There is a continuous exchange between hippocampus

and the body during focusing. Big changes we call **felt shift**, felt in the body and recorded at first in the hippocampus. The felt shift is a big correction of a map. It means that an old mistake on the map is eliminated and replaced by a new experience as result of the focusing-process. The result of this process is sent from the hippocampus to the cortex, where the revised map is stored again. This path from the hippocampus to the cortex needs time, minimum one minute. That is the time, which we need at the end of a focusing-process for "acceptance".

Now back to my patient with gastritis. He has maps about his son and his wishes for love, which are no longer compatible, it means, he has a **conflict**. The mistake on his map with the name "expected love" is translated in the hypothalamus as alterations of secretion of gastric acid. I mentioned before: The body has only one answer to hunger expecting fast feeding, either hunger for food or for love. The answer is the increased production of gastric acid. Because his conflict is chronic, the hyper secretion of gastric acid is chronic as well with the result of a chronic irritation of the mucous membrane of the stomach. Or the other example: When we feel a warm area in our body during focusing, then the vessels of blood must be dilated in this area. The width of vessels is regulated by the vegetative nerves, depending on signals of the hypothalamus.

Finally I'd like to tell you, why I had the idea to use the model of maps for understanding of focusing. I learnt in my first lectures about focusing, that "the felt sense is bound on structures, which we don't know until now". As a doctor I didn't believe, that there are still unknown structures in the human body, because the morphological structures are the best known facts of it. They are easier to define than physiological processes in the body or in the brain. So I decided to learn about **known morphological structures** and connections between brain and the organs in the body and how I can relate the felt sense to known morphological structures. These structures in the brain are the cortex, the hippocampus and the hypothalamus, for the transfer the vegetative nerves and the bloodstream and in the body the organs and the hormonal glands.

The connections of brain and body during focusing

The felt sense as a copy of the memorized experience recorded in the brain like a map and transmitted to the body by the nervous system and the bloodstream.

A “map” in the cortex includes all facts about an issue. The accompanying emotions are recorded too, so the registration becomes the quality of an experience. This complete map arrives at the hippocampus during focusing. The hypothalamus is then the next station, where the map is translated into signals for the vegetative nervous system, the secretion of hormones and the immune system. That causes functional reactions in the organs of chest and abdomen, which we can feel as felt sense.

Felt shifts are corrections of the map, felt in the chest and abdomen and registered in the brain. The consequences are alterations of view and behaviour.