

Focusing and Spirituality: the Still Small Voice Within

by: Kathleen McGuire, Ph.D.

Each person is born with a unique blueprint, a special talent, a particular part to play in the web of the Universe.

If you believe this to be true, if you see the unfolding of your particular blueprint as a spiritual task, how can you discover your unique path? If it's a once-in-the-world map, yours alone, then no voice outside, no guru, can tell you exactly what to do. You can watch what you eat, exercise, keep your body as a temple, prepare the way, but how discover the unique Mystery of your Being?

Meditation, prayer, and psychotherapy are all ways of undertaking the journey to find "the still small voice within". Eugene Gendlin's Focusing technique (Gendlin, *Focusing*, Bantam, 1981, and *Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams*, 1986) is a formal description of the steps one can use to dialogue with the Soul.

Focusing involves setting aside all of your already-known intellectual explanations and paying attention to the bodily felt meaning in the center of your body, in the area of the solar plexus. How are you, right now? Check in there to find the answer, not in words, but as a subtle sensing of the whole of your Being. If I ask you, "Who are you?", you can look to the same place for an answer, freshly crafted at this moment of your journey.

However, the answers to more difficult spiritual questions, like "What is the morally correct thing for me to do in this situation?;" "Is this job opportunity in the direction of my calling?;" "Why does my life feel stuck right now?;" "What's in the way of following my path?;" "Why do I continue being angry when peace is my goal?;" "What is blocking my experience of God?" demand some more difficult navigation inside. In particular, you need to learn to tell the difference between the voice of the Critic, the introjected Superego that tells you what you should do, what you must do, what a person of your culture would do, and "the still small voice," the personal conscience which keeps you on the path of your own unique inner meanings. Focusing practice helps you learn to distinguish between these voices.

Clearing A Space

Clearing A Space is an exercise which you can use as a prelude to soul-searching. It can also stand alone, as a meditation opening you to your experience of spiritual connection. Set aside at least twenty minutes in a quiet place where you won't be interrupted:

Lie down, or sit in a comfortable position.

Close your eyes. Begin to pay attention to the rhythm of your breathing...

Now ask yourself, "What's between me and feeling totally at peace? (or "feeling my spiritual connection" or "being in the light" or "Oneness"-however you call your spiritual space)

And wait and see what arises-some issue or problem, whatever comes. And name it.

Now, notice how you carry that concern in your body. What's the feel of the whole thing? Where do you feel it in you body-in your shoulders, chest, heart, stomach? Where?

Now, see if you can take the feel of the whole thing, wrap it up into a parcel, and set it outside of yourself--on a table, beside you, on a park bench, whatever image works for you. Put it out, as near or as far as is comfortable. See if you can feel your body lighten a little as you move that out...there may be a sigh of relief...

Now ask, "What else is in the way?" (between me and the Light;" "between me and God;" whatever words work for you) and see what comes...

Again, name the issue, spend a moment seeing how you carry that whole thing in your body, and then wrap it up and set it outside...Ahhhh! (there is often a sigh of relief!)

Continue in this way until you have named, felt, and lifted out everything that comes.

Now ask, "Is there anything else between me and peace?" ("me and feeling okay;" "me and God," whatever works for you). Look for a background feeling, like wallpaper, something you carry with you all the time without noticing it...

If you find such a thing, name it, get the feel of the whole thing, and set it outside...

Now, if everything is cleared, you will find yourself at the center of your Being, One with the web of the Universe, floating in the Light, united with the God or Goddess Within...Stay here as long as you like, dwelling in the Spirit.

Soul-Searching

If you have a particular spiritual question to explore, you can follow the complete steps of Focusing:

Clear a Space: Take an inventory of everything you're carrying, setting each thing outside.

Choose a Question: Choose the one thing from the list you want to explore more deeply.

Get the Felt Sense: Look for the subtle feel of the whole thing in the center of you body.

Find a Handle: Look for words or an image that are just right in describing the felt sense.

Resonate: Check the handle against the felt sense and fine-tune until the fit is exactly right. Your body will say, "Yes, that's it."

Ask: Ask open-ended questions, like "Why is this so hard for me?", "Why does this have me stuck?" or "What's so special for me about this?", "Why does this matter to me?", and wait for at least a minute to see what comes in the center of your body.

Receive: Find words or an image that are just right. Gently take in whatever comes from "the still small voice", not judging, just sitting with.

Start again: If you want to continue, ask a further question, like, "And how is that central for me?" and repeat the Focusing process again.

If you hear a voice saying what you should do or what you always do or how you can't do anything right, see how you feel in the center of your body when you hear those words. If you feel squashed down or hurt, it's a good sign that your Critic is speaking and needs to be told firmly to step aside, so that you can sense into the more subtle, small voice in the center of your Being. At a later point, you might turn your attention to the Critic, and ask it, "So what's this about for you?" and use the Focusing process to let it make its contribution.

Finding Meaning

I often use Focusing to find the meaning of my life. I find it helps to pay attention to the things that move me to tears. Our tears seem to serve as a guide to what matters, a spiritual essence. You can use Focusing to make words for anything that calls forth strong emotion. Let's end by doing a gentle Focusing meditation upon a religious or spiritual symbol that has deep meaning for you, that moves you:

Choose a comfortable position.

If you like, bring a meaningful symbol (an object, picture, poem, spiritual reading) before you and spend some time with it. Otherwise, think about some of the spiritually meaningful moments of your life. Choose one which you would like to explore for deeper meanings.

Close your eyes, and come to the center of your Being, the space around your solar plexus, by paying attention to the rhythm of your breathing...

Clear away any unfinished business that gets in the way by just noticing it and setting the feel of "the whole thing" outside...

Now bring your spiritual symbol or experience to the center of your awareness. See it in you imagination...

Turn your attention to the center of your body, notice the feel of the whole thing--not anything you've thought about it, but the felt sense that comes in the center of your body as you imagine it, the essence of the whole thing.

Carefully try to find words or an image or even a gesture or movement that is just right in capturing the feel of it.

Check the words or image against the felt sense, fine-tuning until they are exactly right. You should feel a slight tension release, a "Yes! That's it..."

Ask yourself, "Why is this so important to me?" or "How does this let me touch God?" or another question which helps you ponder the meaning for you. Wait, at least a minute, and see what comes....

Carefully find words or images to describe the felt meaning. Gently, without judgment, receive whatever has come. If you find yourself moved to tears, welcome this as one sign that you are on the path of personal meaning.

Continue with another cycle of asking and receiving if you want, or, when you are ready, open your eyes.

Biospirituality

The secret of Focusing lies in the moments when, instead of answering from your head, you wait and let your body's Wisdom speak to you. Catholic priests Campbell and McMahon, in their book *Bio-spirituality: Focusing as a Way to Grow*, talk about Focusing as a way of preparing yourself for the Holy Spirit. The Focusing attitude and Focusing steps make an opening; what comes in the place of "the still small voice" is an act of grace.

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