

STAYING IN FOCUS

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Focusing in Prison By GENA COREA, *Focusing Trainer, USA*

The inmate was called to the prison administration office that morning and told his mother had died. He spent the morning in agony. Some hours later, he was summoned again and told there had been a mistake. It was not his mother who had died but another inmate's mother.

By the time he reached the Focusing class I was teaching in the prison chapel, the inmate—I'll call him Ricardo—was twisted in a tangle of emotions. Clearing a space in a Focusing session, he separated out the strands: residual grief over an event that had not happened, confusion and a sense of the ground shifting beneath him, fear that his tumultuous emotions would endanger him—that if those emotions surfaced in the presence of prison authorities, he would be seen as a troublemaker and punished.

As Ricardo spoke each thread with trembling voice and found it met with acceptance, his body literally shook. In time, he wept. It was not his Focusing partner alone who met him with "the Focusing Attitude." The inmates encircling him radiated compassion.

That was seven years ago. Focusing Coordinator Joan Klagsbrun had invited me into a New England prison to facilitate a Focusing workshop with her. I have been going into that prison ever since. Now, rather than teaching Focusing itself, I integrate bits of Focusing into most everything I do.

Here are some of the bits:

CLEARING A SPACE At the beginning of our three-hour session, before we check-in individually around the circle, I sometimes lead a group clearing of space. This helps us slow down and get into our bodies.

LISTENING We do many listening practices with the Focusing attitude. Once we did a round robin, each man listening deeply to the man on his left in the circle and then, in turn, speaking to the man on his right. I was so knocked out by the beauty of the listening, I said, when we were finished, that the listening had been truly extraordinary. Kareem, who has the presence of an elder, contradicted me.

"That wasn't extraordinary listening," he said. "That was ordinary. That's the way we listened to each other all the time on Death Row. We didn't think the state was going to kill us, but they could have. We routinely listened to each other all the time the way we just listened here. And when we came out into the general [prison] population after the death penalty was repealed [in this state], we had a strength about us."

CREATING A FIRST PERSON SCIENCE OF CRIMINOLOGY. The first day I went into the prison on my own, I proposed to the inmates a six-week course on



If you are applying Focusing in a prison setting, please let us know by contacting Gena at genovefa@sover.net

Focusing. Quoting Gene Gendlin, I said that everyone has a laboratory for studying what a human being is--his own human body. Focusing provided a key to the laboratory door. I gave the men several hand-outs on first person science, including one suggesting a project exploring violence against women.

I wrote in the hand-out, "If men can deal with the experience of violence against women, going deep into their own laboratory for investigating *what is a human being*, and bring back discoveries, this would be a huge contribution to humanity. It involves courageous exploration of inner space."

I mentioned that in the 1960s and '70s, women in consciousness-raising groups exploring their experiences as women, including as victims of male violence, had begun creating a first person science. If men who had committed violence against women began looking inward to explore what led them to commit such violence, and shared their explorations with each other and looked for patterns, a kind of underground tunnel could begin to connect women and men.

The handout read, "When men get at what is really going on inside and around them before and as they committed the violence, then, in hearing their accounts of what they discover, the community is going to recognize human beings. With that recognition comes the possibility of connection. Also, following these discoveries, the men will know what's needed to prevent violence against women."

I proposed this the first day, distributed the handout but never mentioned it again. Years went by. During those years, unbeknownst to me, an inmate present that day, serving time for his second rape conviction, kept pulling out the handout and rereading it. Finally, as he later told me, he felt, "I'm ready to do this." Some four years after first reading the handout, he wrote a letter to the inmate board that runs our program, proposing that we undertake a series on violence against women. The board agreed. We began.

SERIES ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN We used a written form of Focusing, Sondra Perls' *Guidelines for Composing*, to plow the ground for this work. To the "inventory" portion of the practice, I added questions specific to the area of investigation. One man told us that in the week following that first session, he had kept rereading what he had written in the Focusing practice, upset at his own evidence of how violent he had been to his wife. Sitting with all that, he experienced a felt shift. He realized that all the years he had been committing violence against his wife and ignoring his children, he had not cared what he was doing. Now, it hit him, he cared very much. He was so upset at what he had done because he cared. Suddenly he realized that he had evolved from a man who did not care about the suffering he caused to one who deeply cared.

Further first-person investigations might involve exploring the steps between not-caring and caring.

(Outside of this prison, I guided a man convicted of manslaughter in a series of Focusing sessions over many months. The many shifts this man experienced—a privilege and wonder to share—has convinced me of the power of Focusing in developing a first-person science of criminology.)

SPEAKING CIRCLES AND FOCUSING We may have a loosely suggested topic for a Speaking Circle. I sometimes guide us into our bodies before the Circle. If the subject is "invisibility", as it once was, I might say, leaving pools of silence between suggestions, "Invite a sense of what's alive for you now around *invisibility*, being invisible. Keeping your attention in your throat, chest and belly, notice what comes. See if you can describe the body feel that comes. Notice if there's a word, phrase, image, sound or gesture that captures that body feel." At that point, we'd come back to the room and begin the Speaking Circle.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION (NVC) We have done a lot of work with Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication, a practice that involves communicating what one is feeling and needing in particular situations and imagining what might be the feelings and unmet needs of a person with whom one is in conflict. In an NVC exercise, I guided the men into their bodies and slowed things down so they had the time and the location—the body--to sense into their feelings and needs before attempting to articulate them.

TOUGH GUISE We used the educational video *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity* to look at media-constructed ideals of manhood that equate masculinity with violence and control. We explored the ways in which these images separated men from vital parts of themselves.

We watched a section of the video that showed footage of the Wizard of Oz, a man creating an image of himself that is not the actual man underneath the costume. I used questions from the video study guide to create group Focusing practices. Leaving intervals of silence for the body's responses, I would say, for example, "The Wizard, in his masculine performance, presents himself as powerful and all-knowing. Invite a memory of a personal experi-

ence—involving yourself or someone you’ve known—in which there was pressure to be a *real man*, perhaps suppressing your actual feelings—a memory of when you had to put on a performance of tough masculinity. Get a body feel for all-about-that. Notice if there’s a word, image or gesture that captures that body sense. Check that word or image with the body sense to see if it’s just right or not-quite-right.”

At that point, the men opened their eyes. One by one, they spoke from what the *Tough Guise* video sparked in them, referring to their experiences in the Focusing practice or not as they chose.

Alex spoke of the pressure by male peers to do something that he knew in his gut wasn’t right. But to question doing it was to risk being called a sissy. He added, “Not being able to admit that something hurt is part of what led me to be here.”

PROTECTING GREEN SHOOTS During discussions and practices with the inmates, I’m on the alert for signs of the tender new growth Gene Gendlin calls “green shoots.”

For example, an inmate I’ll call Carl had spent part of his childhood in orphanages after having been abandoned by his mother when he was 18 months old. He told us that once years ago, in his late thirties, he was writing a letter to his mother asking her the question that had been living in him all his life, “What did I do wrong? What did I do so wrong that you left me?” Everyone’s mother loves him, he told us. So if his mother didn’t love him, there must be something deeply wrong with him.

A few years after he wrote this letter, he told us that at a recent parole board hearing, he’d found himself asking the board, “What could an 18-month-old have possibly done that was so terrible his mother would leave him?”

I stopped him here to protect this very new green shoot. Guiding him into his body, I suggested he notice where in his body he was feeling this question and just how it felt. Could he let that feeling be as big as it wanted to be in his body? Might he walk around in that feeling, get acquainted with it enough to find his way back to it later? We slow things down at a point like this so the new life doesn’t get trampled on.

FOCUSING WITH HEALING We have been doing a series on hands-on and distant healing that includes a video workshop on Quantum Touch. I’ve also attuned three of the men to Reiki. Many, including prison inmates, might view this sort of healing as “weird.” Certainly it falls outside the paradigm of alleopathic medicine.

Bruce Nayowith, who is both an M.D. and a Focuser, assisted in the prison in two of these hands-on healing sessions. Leading the men in a practice to develop medical intuition, he also lent credibility to the healing practices with his explanations of how they might “work.”

When, months later, the wife of one of the inmates was diagnosed with brain cancer, all the men in the group suddenly got fully behind these healing practices. They were motivated by a desire to help both the wife and her husband, their fellow inmate.

These practices provide ways for the prisoners to send healing to loved ones who are undergoing physical or emotional crisis or are actually dying. The men also sent distant healing to the victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the Gulf Coast in 2005.

“I’ve never been in a flood,” one prisoner, identifying with ‘the left-behind’ in New Orleans, told us. “But I know what it is to lose everything and have no one listen and no one care.”

The men also practiced distant healing on their younger selves. Here again, Focusing played a role. I asked the men to invite their bodies to present a time when they were younger and very much needed comforting and kindness and yet had not received that kindness. Keeping their attention in the throat, chest and belly, where did they sense something as the memory of that time came?

The men then either placed two caring hands over that part of the body where they had a felt sense of their younger self, or they held their younger self in thought-form between their two hands and sent healing. After some time, we placed all of these younger selves in the center of the room and, as a group, sent healing to them.

Afterwards, Harry, a man in his 70s with an upbeat persona I had never seen him drop, wept for the first time in the years I’d known him. He told us that when he was 20 years old, a platform he and his brother had been standing on while painting a building collapsed. He was injured. His brother was killed. After his brother died, Harry walked through the hospital corridors, tears in his eyes. A white-coated physician passing Harry in the hall called to him, “Toughen up, kid.”

That kid, who had needed a kindness he’d never received then, was the one he and the rest of us had just been healing. Now past 70, the kid was finally able to let his tears flow.

FOCUSING AND THE LIVING TORAH PROJECT

By STEVE MOSCOVITCH, *Focusing Trainer, Canada*

Combining Focusing with my religious practice brought me new steps in the form of words and images that connected me more vibrantly with my Jewish spiritual heritage. These steps and their urgings were surprising and not entirely understandable to me. They led to supportive and encouraging conversations with Gene Gendlin and Mary Hendricks. They also led to finding others who like myself have been deeply affected by the growth that Focusing brings and who have been moved to use this process to explore, enliven and bring more of themselves to their own Jewish spiritual practice. We wanted to bring Focusing to our synagogues, temples and study groups. I will describe the project we undertook in my own Synagogue and its steps to date.

The idea of discussing Focusing with my Synagogue's two rabbis went through a period of gestation. Then last April, I spoke to one of our rabbis on a ride home from a *shiva* visit. (A *Shiva* is the seven-day practice of praying with and comforting those who are mourning the loss of a loved one.) I told him of a brief conversation I'd had at our Synagogue's weekend retreat with Rabbi Zalman Schacter (the founder of the Jewish Renewal movement) about his familiarity with Focusing. I also related my own experiences of having the Synagogue service deepened by bringing some of my Focusing skills to the formalized prayers within the prayer book. I told him of the Synagogue Project which the Focusing Institute was developing. Could I introduce Focusing somewhere into Synagogue life? He was receptive. As one familiar with meditation, he could refer to some inner experience that helped him understand what I was talking about. He encouraged me to arrange a meeting with him and the associate rabbi.

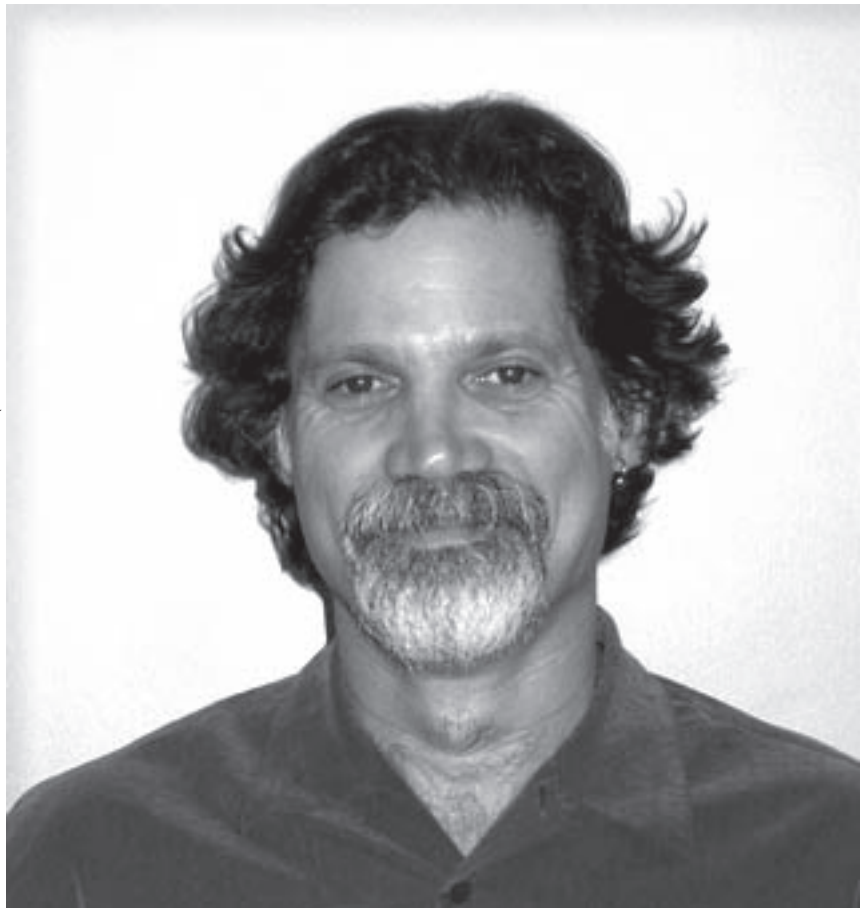
At the meeting I spoke about the origins of Focusing, its use in spiritual development in other faith traditions, and the work of Rabbis Zalman Schachter and Goldie Milgram, as well as Ruth Hirsh, with Focusing and Jewish practice. I spoke as well about my own experience, how since practicing Focusing I could read something in the prayer book and resonate with the human experience of those who articulated those words so many years before.

At their request I gave them a taste of Focusing. I guided them to sense into their bodies and find some issue or concern they might be carrying in the moment so they could experience a felt sense and a gentle Focusing relationship and attitude toward "it." One rabbi did so; the other drifted into sleep! In retrospect I'd choose a more joyful "something" to get a sense of. It would have provided more safety. Still they were interested in doing something with Focusing. I left them the article by Reb. Goldie Milgram on Focusing and Judaism and a Gene Gendlin piece on a Synagogue Project. We agreed to meet after Passover.

Rabbis are busy people. Finally there was a meeting with one rabbi who proposed the idea of an experimental Torah study class called "Focusing on the Living Torah."

Coincidentally he'd been introduced to Focusing and text study several years before while a rabbinical student. I agreed to help teach the experimental class. Personally it promised to give me a way to connect with the Torah, something I'd found daunting. (The Torah refers to what from a Christian perspective is the Old Testament: The 5 books of Moses, the writings of the Hebrew prophets and the Psalms.)

In January 2006 it began. The advertisement, posted in the synagogue bulletin and



If you are a trainer interesting in joining the TFI synagogue project, please send a note to Steve at smoscovitch@hotmail.com

read aloud with other announcements after the Sabbath service asked, “How can we deepen our encounter with the Torah’s vibrant and intimate wisdom? Experiential Focusing can provide a bridge between our inner lives and the text. Focusing is a process of deep inner listening. It is our hope that it can enliven our intellectual approach to the weekly *parsha* (portion of the text) and expand its meaning and implications for our lives.”

The first of six bi-monthly weekday morning classes (each one and a half hours long) was attended by six women, a few of them my long time friends. I began by saying that Focusing is a particular way of deeply listening to oneself. Influenced by an exercise in Neil Freidman’s *Focusing: Selected Writings*, I asked them to close or diffuse their gaze and listen to their inner selves for about thirty seconds. Discussion about “what” they listened to and for (thoughts, physical tensions, emotions, bodily felt senses, imagery) helped me to know their internal point of departure and to direct them to the bodily felt sense. I then briefly introduced them to Gendlin’s research discovery and later systematic articulation of the Focusing process. I handed out Neil Freidman’s functional definition of Focusing (“Focusing is a process of finding felt-senses and then interacting with them in a friendly way so as to feel movement.” *Selected Essays*, p. 172). We then set out to “find felt senses.”

I asked the group to “go inside” and find the felt sense of “something in Jewish life that I love or find meaningful.” I asked them to give me a thumbs up signal when they found that something --to locate the body feel--to put a hand on “it”—to find a way to describe “it” and find the description’s resonance. All were able to do this. Then the rabbi began the Torah study—Exodus—a section describing Moses leading his sheep in the wilderness not knowing where water would be found. The inwardness of the previous exercise had him very close to his heartfelt experience of the text. I asked him if I could reflect back what I’d heard so he would not have to be lonely with it. He accepted my offer. The atmosphere deepened, and as more people spoke I listened reflectively to them as well. We explored what Moses’ inner experience may have been. We ended the class with going inside and asking: what wants to be remembered and carried forward from the class?

In later classes, we worked with Clearing a Space for Torah Study. I provided the suggestion to “go inside and notice if there is anything you’re carrying that is in the way of being peacefully open to this encounter with the Torah.” When they sensed something, they were asked to imagine wrapping “it” up carefully and respectfully and putting “it” in a place of honor, perhaps a sacred place somewhere in the Synagogue; and to assure “it” that they would return to “it” later from a place inside that had been strengthened and deepened by their Torah study.

The ensuing discussion was compelling and useful. Without sharing the content of their space clearing, there were some who said they didn’t understand why I spoke of putting an issue or concern in a “sacred place.” One person, Ms. L, said, “I wanted to throw it out the window and into the snow far away from here.” This led to a discussion of the Focusing attitude of acceptance, and Gendlin’s oft quoted statement, “Every bad feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of living if you give it space to move toward its rightness.” We worked on building skill in finding a safe distance from feelings part of us wishes we didn’t have. The rabbi made the statement that the Hebrew word for “holy”—*kadosh*--has as its root “to separate,” suggesting that, through the act of making space from felt senses and relating to them in honoring ways, we might liberate holy energies from them.

The next time we met and cleared a space, after practice with ‘safe distance skills,’ Ms. L was able to put the issue out without banishing it. She had asked for Divine assistance and thus brought together her prayer practice (she was in a synagogue after all!) and the new experience with Focusing. The smile on her face was radiant as she sat with both experiences. The rabbi spoke of how he had used the clearing-a-space process to find some inner experience of *Shabbat* (Sabbath), which is a working day for rabbis. He also spoke of how he’d used the process when meeting with a bereaved family. It enabled him to get a sense of the deceased and to give a eulogy for the first time in his career without writing it out first. The family members came to him gratefully to let him know that he “got” their parent.

The project has been gratifying so far. The first six weeks extended into another six weeks. Of course, I will experiment with doing some things differently. Just prior to starting the class, I heard an interview on *Tapestry*, a radio program that explores spirituality within as well as outside all faith traditions. The teacher interviewed, who teaches Torah study at York University in Toronto, described Torah as a doorway into the human heart and studying Torah as entering that doorway and walking around in it. Focusing does that as well. How wonderful to be part of bringing the practices together! How even more wonderful to use Focusing and listening as a way to explore both shared and differing human experiences within the spiritual vocabularies of all religious traditions.

Focus On: Marine de Freminville, Ph.D.

by Jan Hodgman, M.A. Trainer, USA

Marine de Fréminville, a clinical psychologist, has been practicing and teaching Focusing for more than 20 years. She is cofounder of The Bilingual Focusing Center of Montreal and offers Focusing Trainer Certification programs.

She has also presented Focusing workshops on background feeling, dreams, inner child and inner critic in France and Belgium. As an EMDR practitioner, she finds great value in combining Focusing and EMDR to deal with trauma and unresolved grief. She recently worked on the new edition of Gendlin's Focusing into French.

JH : You've been doing innovative work with "Background Feelings." Can you tell us what drew you to this?

Marine : When I discovered Focusing with Gendlin in 1985, I learned to "clear the space" as a prelude to the Focusing process and discovered how helpful it was --to breathe through more inner space! When invited to "clear my space," I discovered some of my creativity: I had an uncomfortable feeling of the void, and when I explored a way to get some distance from it, it suddenly became a pink balloon with a string! Being able not to get identified with this uncomfortable feeling allowed me to experience a big felt shift right away!

Then I heard about "Background Feeling" without realizing clearly what it was. Gendlin said, "When a problem does allow itself to be placed in a space made for it, there is a change in the body, something like a felt shift. Of course the problem is not resolved. But I believe it is very helpful first to have put a problem down, let the body live without it, then work on it. People who were able to put all or several such now-coming problems down, often remark, 'Oh, I'm not the problem. I can sense myself as something different from it.'"

Clearing our inner space can also bring another kind of experience, described by Gendlin as, "... a vast breadth, a big space, that comes here, which has spiritual overtones." If nothing like that happens, Gendlin invites us to pay attention to the "Background Feeling." This is some way you always feel, like always sad, always rushing, always trying hard, always lonely, etc. Whatever your always-feeling is, take that out too. And he adds, "Often it is taking this one out...that opens the big space." So I dearly wanted to experience the opening of the "big space"!

But I could not. That was the obstacle that became the reason for my exploration with the Background Feeling.



I couldn't understand how this Background Feeling, so often sad or heavy, was so persistent. So the best way to deal with it came from the Focusing attitude itself--staying with it. I discovered that other Focusers were like me, so I invited them to be with their Background Feeling in different ways.

JH: Could you describe the steps you've developed?

Marine: After paying attention to the breathing and being in touch with what is felt in the body and (if needed) "clearing a space," I invite people :

- 1) to identify and feel their Background Feeling, then
- 2) to notice the relationship they experience with it, especially if it is recurrent: (rejection, impatience, frustration, anger, negation or tolerance, compassion and even love). It is not always easy to be friendly with it. We can just notice it, tolerate, or acknowledge it. Elfie Hinterkopf invites us to look at the Background Feeling as "the predominant feeling one has toward life" (or I will say, toward one's own life). People often feel afraid of life or somewhat angry at life, or someone might find life burdensome or heavy. She suggests not to take it out but to Focus on it. "Focusing on an uncomfortable Background Feeling tends to be a slow process but often leads to powerful changes in one's life." As Agnes Wild-Missong said, "It is deep work. These are very heavy processes and it will be important to have a guide or a listener."

If you try Focusing on the Background Feeling, please contact Marine about your experience at mdefreminville@hotmail.com.

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Stories from Afghanistan: Women Learn to be Gentler

Told by LAILA MASJIDI, Focusing Trainer, Afghanistan, to PAT OMIDIAN, AFSC and Focusing Coordinator, Afghanistan, and to NINA LAWRENCE, Focusing Coordinator, USA and Afghanistan

The workshops explain Focusing in an Islamic context, and then the participants as a whole group are guided in Focusing every day for a half hour. After they are familiar with this process, they take turns guiding the group themselves; they also listen to each other in the group after Focusing and often share details of their experience. They prefer to do this in the group, not in pairs. The rest of each day's workshop puts Focusing in a context with information about stress, what is normal and abnormal in their culture, and resiliency. They like the resiliency training and Focusing very much. Workshops meet for three hours a day, once a week for four months. The groups are encouraged to continue meeting on their own.



Nina Lawrence (left) and Laila Masjidi at their workshop in Kabul. The Focusing Project is funded by UNIFEM and is operated by the American Friend's Service Committee under the leadership of Patricia Omidian.

STORIES FROM A WORKSHOP AT

KABUL UNIVERSITY BY ONE OF THE INTERNS:

Wahab, a Community Focusing Trainer and student intern, is practicing teaching Focusing on campus in a classroom with his 15 classmates. One day Wahab's professor came around, opened the door of the class and was wondering what they were doing. Professors are suspicious of young people meeting on their own. Wahab took the professor's hand, and said, "Come sit, and see what we are doing." When the professor saw what they were doing, he was happy. He said it was a very good program.

One student was not socializing, always sitting alone, and no one liked him. Part way through Wahab's workshop, this student wrote a letter to Wahab's supervisor, Laila, saying, "Thank you for this seminar. It has changed my life!" He is socializing and having friends now. He is able to go to the blackboard and explain some things in his working group. He can get up in front of groups for the first time.

STORIES FROM THE WORKSHOP IN GHAZNI, A TWO HOUR DRIVE (ON A GOOD ROAD) SOUTH OF KABUL:

When the women start Focusing in the workshops, they don't know what it is, and they don't like it. It feels unfamiliar and doesn't make sense, and they say, "What is this!?" and want to push it away. After they learn, they want the teacher to do Focusing everyday with them. They say, "We go inside and afterwards we are very relaxed."

Co-wives (two wives of the same man) were always fighting with each other. One works outside the home as a teacher, and one works in the home. The home-based wife is getting the psychosocial/Focusing training. She reports that she has stopped fighting with her co-wife! Others in the family ask why we didn't have this training last year, because for the past year they had all this grief. Now it is good. They like it very much.

A woman said, "I have three daughters-in-law in my house. Any time they didn't work, I would beat them, and I would also beat their children. Now I'm changed. When I came to the workshop and found it very good, I brought all three of my daughters-in-law. It is very important for us." When she was telling this story the daughters-in-law were right there, happy and laughing. They said she was very, very changed.

One of the participant women said, "When my son comes home from his work, his children come in and sit on his lap. I say, "My son is very tired. You go outside," and I beat them. Now I am changed. I don't say to them to go outside. Now I know I have my son, and my son has children, and he loves them like I love my son. They are

my grandchildren.”

THESE STORIES ARE FROM THE VILLAGE OF SAEED KHAIL, ABOUT 85 KILOMETERS FROM KABUL:

The women like this program. “We didn’t like that we beat our children when the children were speaking. We were telling them not to talk whenever they started talking. Now we are changed. Before we didn’t have patience. We were very busy. We said, “Don’t talk, go outside!” Now we know. We don’t do that any more.” One woman said, “My oldest child said, “Mother, why did you change? The day before, you beat us. Now you are very changed.” They like it very much.”

There is a very old woman in the Saeed Khail workshop. She said, “When I came out of my house to go to the class, one of my neighbors, a man, asked “Where are you going? You are very old. This isn’t important for you.” This woman said, “I need this program. It is new for us. I change, and my family changes. I learn very important things in this program.”

Focus On: *Marine de Fréminville, continued from page 6*

3) Then after identifying and noticing your relationship or attitudes toward it, see if it is possible to take some distance from it or, if not, to pay attention to what comes if you ask: How would my life be without the Background Feeling? But even more: How would it be BEYOND that Background Feeling? or even, Who am I BEYOND that feeling so often or always there? Once, giving a Focusing workshop in France, a participant met her true nature for the first time. Beyond the apparent obstacle was the implicit light of her true self. Sometimes it takes some courage to pay attention to this uncomfortable feeling. But with Focusing we know that something “more,” not yet accessible, can emerge.

4) In working with Background Feeling, it became clear that it could be related to something repressed. So I invite Focusers to pay attention to the possible “repressed something.” Here is another precious contribution of Gendlin’s. “When something comes from the past, or is related to childhood, we can offer that question to the felt sense: ‘What should have happened?’” At a workshop for therapists in 1991, Gendlin said, “We all have in us this blueprint of what should have happened.” When he said that, a door opened to a new path for me. The scenario of my life was rewriting itself with what should have happened and a great healing process unfolded.

JH: What have been some of your recent innovations in this work?

Shirley Turcotte has a long experience in using Focusing to work with trauma. In Costa Rica she gave a presentation with Anne Poonwassie which had an impact on me. She said, “50% of my clients are dealing with vicarious traumatization!” That means that they were absorbing stuff from their environment: parents, relatives, etc . I felt in my spine a kind of high voltage electricity, as if my body knew immediately the truth of it! Very strange. Why, as a French woman without major known trauma, could I get such an intense reaction? It opened a huge door to experiences which became clearer step by step (e.g. some repressed emotions of my mother a long time ago, impact of ancestors).

So Step 5: I invite the Focusers to see what comes when they ask themselves : Is there something in this Background Feeling that does not belong to me ? Something that I could have absorbed from my environment ? Then to acknowledge whatever emerges. A powerful question to ask the body can be: “ Does my body know that it is over, that the traumatic situation is over?” This can bring such relief!

6) Another amazing contribution, that now seems so obvious to me, is to ask : “Did something like that happen concretely in my life?” like, “I feel again a kind of fear of being squashed or crushed. Did something like that happen to me?” Yes, I had a large cupboard fall on my back a long time ago ! The body seems to have kept inside the feeling of some forgotten traumatic event that needs to be acknowledged and listened to.

Some Background Feelings are persistent. They keep calling as long as we aren’t getting the message, the gift, as with dreams. I am inviting you to be gentle with the difficult recurrent Background Feelings. They need your attention, without forcing or needing to know a lot about them.

Just being with it and listening to it can bring important transformation. Amazingly, by paying attention to your most difficult issue and exploring a few ways of looking at it, even if you don’t work hard on it, it processes a lot by itself. You can be using some of the invitations offered here, and it can go on processing by itself too, carrying you forward in a transformational way.

JH: Thank you for your wonderful work.

