

**LETTING EMPTINESS FILL ITSELF WITH MEANING --
The Recovery Focusing P.A.U.S.E.**

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*The word "focusing" means to spend time,
attending to that inwardly sensed edge.
When that happens in the silence,
the next thing and the next come gradually from deeper and deeper.*
Gendlin, 1990, p. 211

Within experiencing lie the mysteries of all that we are...
Gendlin, 1970, p. 566

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There is silence that is unbearable. It screams, unheard, in the straight-jacketed hearts of trauma survivors and addictive personalities. As hungry ghosts (Mate, 2010), starving for real human contact, many of us haunt ourselves with substance abuse, process addictions, and out-of-control behaviors, seeking to ease our distress. Curled in on itself, covered in crusty, black shame and heirloomed patterns of dysfunction, the emptiness inside suffocates us. Our false self (Whitfield, 2006), needed for our survival, squeezes our aliveness into distorted shapes that turn life into a surreal, meaningless cartoon. This unforgiving silence echoes through our days, bouncing off the walls of our relationships, unheld. The more we seek to stuff shut its urgent cry with desperate acts, the more it spirals into solitary madness. This is the toxic silence of the wounded souls caught in the nightmarish grip of addiction and trauma.

There is another silence that is calm. It waits with gentle awareness at the edge of our horizon. It knows that the jewels of our being shine underneath the muddy layers of mind noise and inner darkness. It is the spacious quiet of the Focusing pause (Gendlin, 1981; Hendricks, 2003) -- a welcoming silence that lets us discover ourselves and each other as we truly are. The Focusing pause is a curious attending inward that allows our felt experience to emerge (more below). It shows us how to hold ourselves and our feelings in a caring embrace, letting us be all that we are and are becoming. It makes sense of us, of who we are and how we are living our situations, granting us a clarity that brings vibrancy to our relationships. The more we relate to ourselves and others with this quiet, meaning-filled pause, the more we discover the voice of our embodied truth, and are able to let its wisdom guide us forward. As we listen within and are heard by another, the Focusing pause turns our silence into a gateway to liberation and gratitude.

In this article, I explore some of the ways the kind, loving attention of the Focusing pause enables us to transform the strangled inner scream into an expression of all that wants and needs to happen for us to heal. It shows us how to find our next right way of being. By listening within with compassion, we stop the desperate, confused search outside ourselves for something to ease our distress. We can come to rest within this caring companionship and begin speaking our truth in an authentically connecting way. Our hidden needs are finally uncovered, heard, understood, and accepted, by ourselves and by others. This allows us to move into the next level of our emotional development.

The tornado-like, disempowering vicious circles that get set in motion by dependency on a substance or behavior -- whose original intention is to soothe our psychic discomfort -- most often emanate from early childhood trauma or failed attachment needs (Heller & La Pierre, 2012). Though my emphasis will be primarily on the addictive process, the principles highlighted in this article apply to healing from trauma as well (Madison, 2014). I describe the Focusing and Listening pause; briefly explore the Twelve Step view of addiction and Recovery; touch into my H.O.W. We Heal model of Recovery Focusing; and, finally, I summarize some of the ways the Focusing pause can be integrated into a Program of Recovery. I capitalize the words Focusing, Pause, Felt Listening, Felt Relating, and Recovery in order to distinguish these as specific, unique terms relevant to Focusing and the Twelve Step philosophy.

The Focusing Pause

...once into the topic, the more directly he attends to the direct referent, the felt meaning, the less his discomfort and anxiety.
Gendlin, 1964, http://www.focusing.org/gendlin/docs/gol_2145.html

Now, so long as there is a pause, I am easy.
Tidmarsh, 2010, p.8

The Focusing Pause is a conscious decision to pay attention to our body as it feels from the inside. We hold in our attention an issue, situation, or feeling and ask, *“What is the feel of this inside my body?”* We wait in curious, welcoming silence for our experience of this, the *feel* of it, to come into our awareness. This moment’s bodily-sense of how we are living this particular issue or situation soon comes into “focus:” a palpable symbol comes that expresses it. This symbol could be a word or

phrase, an image/metaphor, a body sensation, a song, a memory, an inner “part,” a color, texture, flavor, etc. (Gendlin, 1981). When this occurs, we usually feel a physical release, which may be like a breath of fresh air, or a loosening in our chest, or a release in our bellies. Our bodies feel less tense. This felt shift is often accompanied with a satisfying insight.

This Focusing Pause helps us discover the *feel* of how we are living our situations. This *feel* usually *makes sense*. We *understand* what, why, and how we are feeling. Thus the term *felt sense*. And, as we all know, when things make sense to us, we *feel* better, less tangled, more free!

As I sense into what Focusing means to me in this moment, I get an image of a dirty, foggy, smeared window. Felt sensing wipes it clean. And so it is: with pleasant surprise, I discover I have a clear view into an underwater world of an ocean, full of living creatures. The situation is suddenly interesting. My frustration and tension ease. With this new IN-sight, I am ready and able to navigate my situations to avoid murky or dangerous currents and can better orient myself to find my sought-after destination.

This is the genius of Focusing. It is not just a cognitive process. Felt sensing invites our bodies to reveal their innate wisdom and knowing. Our bodies understand and live our situations (Gendlin, 1993). Just as a plant knows to push through the soil to receive sunlight, by dipping into the spacious silence of the Focusing Pause, we find our own illuminating understandings. We feel more grounded and rooted in ourselves as we stretch down into our embodied

experience. In that silence, we hear ourselves. We understand. With a breath of bodily-felt relief, we know what we need and how to proceed. We are no longer stuck emotionally. Our feelings are once again in process. Our inner body sense of a situation shifts, changes, bringing a feeling of possibility and hope. A breakthrough can now come forth, grow, branch out, and blossom in these new skies.

For those in Recovery from addiction or trauma, I turn this process into the acronym P.A.U.S.E., which means, *Pause. Attend Urgency. Symbolize experience with Empathy.* The foggy brains of people in withdrawal need something simple and clear to, yes, focus on. Simple slogans and acronyms help us remember important concepts. These are particularly important in early Recovery when individuals find coherent thinking to be challenging. The P.A.U.S.E. acronym reminds us to stop what we are doing, attend to the “urgency” by sensing inside, wait for a body sense to emerge, symbolize it, and feel the empathy that results. This then makes sense of the urgency and thus releases us from it. We calm down. We can think rationally again rather than act out of desperation to ease our distress.

Research has shown that this process is the key to change (Gendlin, 1964; Hendricks, 2001). It is this P.A.U.S.E. that enables us to find our way forward into new behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. It is an accessible door to the “mysteries” of human experience.

The Listening Pause

*And it is much easier if someone else
will be there for you in that kind of silence.
So anything interesting about focusing goes on, in the context of relating.*
Gendlin, 1990, p. 223

Many Focusers prefer to process with another person, such as within a Focusing Partnership, during Focusing-Oriented Therapy, with a special, trained listener, or with a group. Gendlin writes, the presence of another human being “changes one’s whole way of being...” (1987, p.76) because we are “inherently, essentially interactional.” As he writes “*When there is no other person, one’s whole interactional way of being gets stuck, becomes permanent, and seems to fall into oneself as if it were one’s individual traits* (Ibid.). Many Focusers have found that Focusing with another person opens up our process in ways that are not possible alone. Having someone *there*, with us, “holding us” in their attention, enables us to better “hold” our own attention inward. Their responses bring new felt responses inside of us. Basically, for many of us, Focusing is easier, deeper, and more fluid when someone else is keeping us company during this interesting inner exploration.

In this felt sensed interaction, which I choose to call “Felt Relating,” both the Focuser and the listener are pausing. That is, the Focusing Pause is supported by a listening pause by our companion, who is holding a *quiet* space for us to contact our felt experience. The Listening Pause is a kind, patient silence. In a Focusing partnership, it requires that, as listeners, we empty ourselves of our ideas, theories, and of our urge to offer suggestions or reassurances (Gendlin, 1987, p. 75). The listener follows the felt sensing process of the Focuser -- with his/her body-sense as well as intellectually --listening with compassion and openness to whatever is emerging.

The essence of listening in Focusing is reflective, empathic responding. When listening, we *pause to receive* the Focuser's process *inside* ourselves. As we gently offer their own words back, *this reflection deepens this resonant felt sense in us*. Our listening can then carry this bodily-felt understanding.

The Focuser may also *pause to take in the listener's reflection*. This taking in of the reflection brings a new internal response and a new level of experiencing. It's like letting our own symbols land once again like seeds on our felt sense, sprouting new living from this now more fertile soil. The interaction is one in which experiencing is carried forward by the shared, yes, felt sensing of both! This slow dance of mutual pausing creates space for more to come.

Another gift of the Relational pause is that, as listeners, not only are we helping the Focuser by offering them the gift of being heard (and bringing more to their process with our presence), but Felt Listening takes us out of ourselves. It pauses our stream of thoughts. It relaxes and grounds us in the moment, functioning as a kind of meditation (emptying of our minds) where we are free of our own personal distractions.

Finally, because we are in fact sharing this embodied, authentic experiencing, and gaining new insights together, we identify with each other. We discover that we are not "terminally unique" (Pluymen, 2000), but in fact touchingly human. This forgiving acceptance and appreciation of our humanity is also one of the gifts of the Twelve Step Pathway (see below). It unburdens us of the heavy load of guilt and shame we have been carrying. Free from this weight of feeling we are somehow

“wrong” or “different,” we can straighten up, look to the surrounding horizon from a new perspective, and concentrate on finding who we are truly wanting to become.

A Carrying Forward Interaction

...we may need a new interaction in which our living can be carried forward.
Hendricks, 2001, http://www.focusing.org/research_basis.html

Focusing/Listening is one living interaction that enables us, as Lynn Preston writes, to “*find a new, more alive, more trusting, open and resilient self*” (Preston, 2001). This is the beginning of freedom from the ingrained patterns of cultural, familial, and personal dysfunction. This resilient self can walk tall on his/her emerging personal life path.

By listening within and listening to each other, we are creating authentic, caring relationships that allow the psychic wounds of addiction/trauma to begin mending. As Kevin McEvenue writes, “*When a part of me feels loved, it awakens to its own healing!*” (2010, *The Folio*, p 64). Felt Relating frees us from the frozen prison of isolation and stuck patterns. It opens the door to loving ourselves and our inner “parts.” The once-unbearable feelings are transformed into paths forward. We shift out of the constricting forces of our previous nightmare into the lightness of being that comes from living from our own congruent truth.

Embodying Recovery Through Felt Relating

*When I look inside myself, I don't find some pure pristine “me”.
I find “a me-with-you.”
My experience of myself is facilitated, shaped and delimited by this “me-with-you.”*
Preston, 2005, www.focusing.org/fot/fot_articles.html

Recovery from addiction is a journey of unbending ourselves to break out of our silent, shame-filled, and secret brokenness. As we fall into our personal “bottom” of “terror, bewilderment, frustration, [and] despair” (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 151), we awaken to the truth that we cannot stop the sadistic cycle of addiction on our own. We are powerless. Shifting from the curled-in self-absorption of our loneliness and suffering, healing begins the moment we understand this and speak a simple truth to another human being: “I need help.” This honesty releases us from the veil of denial. It is the first step towards finding the power we need to proceed. The truth does set us free. What better way to know our reality than consciously contacting our experiencing? The Focusing Pause -- in the company of another human being -- enables us to access the power of felt sensing and its carrying forward potential as a way to our deeper truth. Recovery and Focusing are strong allies in the search for serenity.

Gendlin (1978) writes, *“Every bad feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of being if you give it space to move toward its rightness”* (p. 76). The primary problem of early Recovery is that we can get swept away by our cravings, destructive urges, or overwhelming feelings. In the presence of a safe and compassionate human being, we are better able to explore these uncomfortable feelings. The company of another person makes it easier to actually DO Focusing (though many people do Focus alone). Relating with a nonjudgmental, grounded person who offers us their kind presence helps calm our system enough for us to

have the presence of mind we need to Focus, which in turn, further enables us to calm down and relax (Zaki and Williams, 2013).

With the P.A.U.S.E. we can disentangle ourselves from overwhelming urges or feelings. By describing the way we experience them, we come to know them and to own them. Felt meaning comes from the discomfort itself! In effect, *easing distress comes from connecting and relating to the distress itself and felt sensing into it.*

Rather than alleviating it with a drug or acting out behavior, the relief comes from the felt shift. The symbolization allows what is truly needed to be revealed. Empathy and understanding replace the critical, punishing thoughts that only cause further injury and angst. We are able to choose and to respond from our body wisdom, rather than succumb to desperation. We can move through the discomfort of withdrawal, facing and coping with our previously numbed-over feelings that have been intensified by sobriety. The P.A.U.S.E. -- Pause. Attend Urgency. Symbolize experience with Empathy. -- is a simple act that can turn what is enslaving us into the key that unlocks our chains.

In the next sections I explore the Twelve Step approach to the addictive process. Understanding this is essential to understanding Recovery Focusing. I also briefly describe my H.O.W. We Heal model, which is the process used in Recovery Focusing, and then offer some suggestions on how the Focusing/Listening Relational Pause may be integrated into a daily program of Recovery.

Addiction and the Absence of Presence & Relating

*Addiction is an isolating disease, closing us off
from society, family, and self.*
Narcotics Anonymous, *Just for today*, Jan 24, 1992

This loss of self is due to the missing felt functioning of experiencing.
Gendlin, 1964, http://www.focusing.org/personality_change.html

As I close my eyes and pause for the feel of addiction, I see someone trapped in a dark slippery well, looking out to an unreachable light. Then, this person scrambles, like Gollum searching for his “Precious” as in *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1937; 1965), desperate to re-experience that fleeting connection to an “IT” that temporarily brings some soothing relief to the discomfort of living alone inside a cave. It’s not real company, not a real relationship. Yet, a relationship it is. The constant search for the pleasure of the “It” keeps the person alone in this small, cold world, far removed from the warmth of the distant light. My body wants to curl in on itself, close itself off from the outside, completing the lonely yet protective self-absorption. I can feel that addiction blinds us to anything else but this vacant relationship. Though it only brings more emptiness and longing, it distracts us from the terrorizing feelings buried underneath our consciousness. At this moment, then, my felt sense of addiction is that it is this kind of isolated relationship with a dissatisfying “IT” that lures us, but never satisfies our natural desire to be in the light, never allows us to have an open relationship with another real human being. It keeps us a prisoner of our own tormenting dark. I am reminded of a quote in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous: “As we became subjects of King Alcohol, shivering denizens of his mad realm, the chilling vapor that is loneliness settled down. It thickened, ever becoming blacker.”* (Alcoholics Anonymous, p 151).

There are many theories on the causes of addiction, on what it is, and how to recover from it (Doweiko, H. 2002). Regardless of its causes and nature, the reality of this life-destructive process is that it severs us from our true nature, separates us from others, and blocks us from experiencing ourselves as part of something greater than ourselves. Fragmenting our sense of self and wreaking havoc on our relationships, it sickens our body, mind, and soul. As this hungry beast progresses to take over more and more of our lives, we slip further down the merciless hole of isolation and despair. It leads many to “jails, institutions, or death” as they say in Narcotics Anonymous. Nicotine addicts “one more” themselves to death, overeaters encase themselves in self-loathing, gamblers lose their precious homes, alcoholics “blackout” large portions of their lives, and Co-dependents struggle desperately to find an identity -- to name but a few of the harsh consequences of this cruel malady.

Gabor Mate (2010) writes that “*three factors need to coincide for substance addiction to occur: a susceptible organism; a drug [or behavior] with addictive potential; and stress.*” (p147). The “susceptible organism” refers to the failed attachment needs of early childhood and trauma. Those of us who did not get our basic needs met -- such as, nurturing, bonding, protection, mirroring, and safety, among others -- don’t know how to effectively regulate our feelings. These early developmental failures lead to ineffective, dysfunctional patterns of relating. These in turn create a propensity to substitute addictive substances and behaviors for mutually regulating interpersonal relationships. Attachment theory characterizes addiction as an attempt at self-repair (Flores, 2001). That is, instead of seeking

healthy relationships and open communication to calm us down, we use addictive substances or behaviors to do so. Addiction is seen as an attempt at self-regulation, a desperate endeavor to “shift the system to a more optimal level of arousal by “self-medication.” (Winhall in Madison, 2014, p.182). In this model, and in Focusing Oriented Therapy, therapeutic relationships are considered crucial to addiction treatment. Focusing Oriented Therapy uses the body wisdom and the creation of a healing relational climate to help people recover from addictive behaviors and emotional dysregulation (Ibid, p. 912).

The founders of Alcoholics Anonymous considered addiction to be a physical and mental disease, for which the only cure was a spiritual awakening. They came up with a “Program” of Recovery that shows us how to be in honest *relationship* with ourselves, with others, and with a power greater than ourselves (Alcoholics Anonymous, p.59). Abstinence, new behaviors that change our worldview, and spiritual practices that reduce stress are needed to stay sober. These essential elements for change are sustained through the principles and values of the Twelve Steps of Recovery, which are summarized in the next section.

As we unfold in mind, body, heart, and soul, the Recovery process opens up our perspective. We feel and think differently. With faith in a new way of living, we dust ourselves off, shake off the fear and trembling, and take tentative, hopeful steps forward into our emerging beingness. Step by step we gain a sense of dignity, a sense of appreciation for who we are, a sense of trust. We “recover” ourselves. We develop an ability to relate authentically to others and to embrace “all that is.” We come to

understand that our past and present experience can benefit others (Ibid. p. 86). Likewise, the experience of others benefits us. We thus find meaning and purpose in life. The Focusing relational P.A.U.S.E. enhances and deepens this awakening by letting us feel it on a physical level and know it with a mental and emotional quality that sparkles with clarity and understanding.

In the next section I summarize the function of the Twelve Steps of Recovery and briefly touch upon how Felt Relating complements these life changing practices.

The Twelve Step Pathway

*...there was nothing left but for us to pick up
the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet.
We have found much of heaven
and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence
of which we had not even dreamed.
Alcoholics Anonymous p. 25*

The Twelve Steps are considered a spiritual (not religious) pathway that leads to a restoration of soundness of mind and recovery from the illness of addiction and other compulsive behaviors. It involves a personal journey of self-awareness that occurs within a community of like-minded souls. The Steps involve specific actions that are suggested as a “Program of Recovery” from alcoholism by the founders of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (p. 59). They show us what is not working in our lives and offer ways of replacing these patterns with values and principles that make life more manageable. By acknowledging and owning our “shortcomings;” sharing these with another person; becoming willing to let them go; and making amends for the harm we have done, we change. This process results in a

spiritual awakening. Rigorously following these Steps is effective because of the power implicit in the principles of working the Steps, which I describe below.

In **Steps One, Two, and Three**, we acknowledge the physical, mental and spiritual nature of the dis-ease of addiction. As I sense inside, I see that these steps are like holding on to a knotted rope that has been thrown into our personal well of despair. We are not physically able to climb out because the walls are too slippery and there is nothing onto which we can hold (all our attempts at sobriety -- emotional or physical -- have failed). We are hopelessly stuck. We break out of the protective cocoon of denial and “come to” understand we cannot find our way out alone. We release our old ideas and become teachable. We take hold of the rope. With the help of others who have gone before us, we are lifted out unto a whole new terrain with wide vistas.

Working these first three Steps takes us from our previous “incomprehensible demoralization” (Ibid., p. 30) and gives us *the power* of the principles of honesty, open-mindedness (faith), and trust (hope). By abstaining and taking care of our bodies we begin breaking our physical dependence on our “drug [or behavior] of choice.” Having done this, and asking for the opinions of others who are sober, we start to think clearly for the first time in a long time. We slowly gain trust in recovery, as well as in some higher force than ourselves. We become willing to establish a relationship with a power of our choice greater than ourselves.

The Focusing Pause enhances these principles of honesty, open-mindedness, and hope because a) it reveals to us our bodily-lived truth; b) it gives us new

insights; and c) the physically-felt shift implies new possibilities for acting and behaving. Body/mind/heart change is deepened, enriched, and carried forward.

Steps Four through Seven enable us to know ourselves. We look back to see how we fell into the well in the first place. What were we thinking? What did we not see? What can we avoid in the future? These Steps help us discover our patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that cause us pain and stress, and which block us from having healthy relationships with ourselves and others. As we undergo this personal inventory, long-repressed feelings are processed and shared with others. We have begun releasing shame and guilt. We have gained an awareness that enables us to choose new attitudes and behaviors that lead to self-esteem. It's as if we are taking a long, refreshing shower to clean off our personal mud in order to go buy new clothes. These Steps give us the power of the principles of courage, integrity, sharing with others, willingness to change, and humility. We have begun healing our relationship with ourselves.

The self-empathy and compassion that Felt Relating encourages; the authentic, vulnerable sharing upon which it is based, and the sense of finally accessing and acting from our body wisdom, all contribute to supporting this new relationship with ourselves. The Focusing Attitude of welcoming without judgment whatever emerges from inside helps us be with the unsettling feelings that visit us during this challenging process. These feelings have come to tell their stories, and we are able to sit with them to have a conversation.

Steps Eight and Nine help us take responsibility for the harm our addictive process may have caused. We make amends to ourselves and others by changing our behaviors and repairing the damage. Free of the self-absorption and obsession of addiction, we are able to begin caring for others. We have walked through swamps, bogs, and frightening forests to reach an elevated ground, where we can picnic with our friends and loved ones. These Steps bring “a new freedom and a new happiness” (Ibid., p. 84), enabling us to let go of resentments and guilt. We gain the power of perseverance, forgiveness, and brotherly love. We have begun healing our relationship with others.

The P.A.U.S.E. empowers us to explore what may be in the way of making amends and also helps us have some self-compassion as we do. As we learn to listen with empathy to others through Focusing and to share our truth, we are empowered to have healthier relationships. Little by little, we learn to have relationships based on mutual respect, authenticity, intimacy, and understanding.

These first nine Steps change “our whole attitude and outlook upon life” (Ibid. 83-84). **Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve** are known as the maintenance Steps. We continue to improve these relationships with ourselves, others, and our Higher Power by striving for the principles of self-awareness, spirituality, and service. It’s as if we continue to pick up, use, improve, and eventually master our “kit of spiritual tools” in order to build a new protective, warm home in a new community, creating a lifestyle that is fulfilling and free of addictive potholes.

The Twelve Steps give us the power to find a new way of living. They liberate us from “the bondage of self” (Ibid., p. 63), those patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that shackled us and prevented us from fully engaging with life and others. The new practices of going to meetings, calling or helping others, meditating, praying, exercising, processing feelings with journal-writing, (etc.) provide new coping tools to help us deal with “life on life’s terms,” as Twelve Steppers often say. They enable us to return to emotional balance when this has been lost. By connecting with others with similar goals, we find safety, peace of mind, and satisfaction from life. We are released from the labyrinths of isolation, fear (terror), guilt, shame, and despair. Sharing our stories at meetings and with our Sponsors while working the Steps helps us understand our history and helps others understand theirs. As the Promises of Step Nine state, “No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience benefits others.”(Ibid p., 83-84) Our lives take on meaning. We come to know we are part of a human (and planetary) community, that we have a purpose, and that we belong. Freed from the crippling hijack of addiction, we are no longer hostages of its mad realm.

How Recovery Focusing Works

*A very striking inward attitude develops:
one receives anything that comes
with a certain gladness that it has come
and is thus about to shift, open up,
and show its inherent rightness.
... it has come to say why it is in the way,
and thereby to release and open the way.
And the way it blocks is the way to feeling and being better.
Gendlin, 1978, p. 340*

We have explored some of the ways in which the Focusing/Listening P.A.U.S.E. supports reconnection with ourselves, others, and a Higher Power, the fundamental aim of the Twelve Step Program. Recovery Focusing applies this powerful way of relating to each of the Steps, using my H.O.W. We Heal model for group process (see below). Through a “compare and contrast” approach, the felt sense of addiction of each person in the group is contrasted with the feel of well-being. Bringing the body sense of the reality of addiction into our experiencing reduces the effect of “euphoric recall” (remembering only the good effects and dismissing the consequences of our use). Felt Sensing into Recovery makes Recovery more attractive. As the whole group is exploring this felt reality of addiction and contrasting it with the possibility of Recovery, the embodied experience of each person becomes more real and meaning-filled.

Healing through we-ing -- felt sensing in community-- creates a special energy that is palpably alive, and which helps call forth and further expand each person’s own living energy. The greater felt sense of our we-ing directly affects our personal healing. As we share from our felt sensed space, we gift the group with our precious experiencing. As each person receives our felt process, their inner felt responding carries their own process further. There is a fresh sense of “us” as part of a whole. Not alone and apart from, but part of a greater aliveness, a greater human potential. Likewise, the group gifts us with its thick energy and shared body wisdom as we listen. Healing becomes one shared, whole process of felt sensing, listening, receiving, and carrying forward together.

The power of the P.A.U.S.E. is increased by the group process, and group process increases the power of the P.A.U.S.E. This interaction deepens and widens the felt experience of each person. This is not only due to the identification and empathy created by authentic sharing, but to the combining of symbols -- the images, metaphors, body senses, words, memories, songs, and inner parts (etc.) that emerge and are received and reflected upon by the group. The symbols are no longer abstract concepts or ideas, as they now carry personal and group meaning. Thus, with this compare and contrast approach, the whole group experiences addiction for what it really is: a process that always gets worse, never better, stealing from us our life force and disconnecting us from our values and loved ones. In contrast, Recovery is also felt for what it is: a positive sense of aliveness and connection, full of hope and infinite possibilities, as many clients at Costa Rica Recovery have expressed (Noel, 2010; 2013).

One of the primary aims of addiction treatment is removing ambivalence and resistance to Recovery (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 41, 2005). Felt sensing enables us to open up stuck patterns to release from within them new possibilities of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Focusing into whatever may be in the way of our Recovery reveals its felt sense. As we stay with the felt sense, it shifts, and insights and fresh steps forward may come from this process. The P.A.U.S.E. may enable us to transform our blocks into stepping stones to healing. It can do so little by little showing us what our body intelligence knows to be the next right step forward. As the Gendlin quote that introduces this section states, "*it*

has come to say why it is in the way, and thereby to release and open the way. And the way it blocks is the way to feeling and being better” (1978, p. 348).

Sharing this process within a group lets us recognize that we share many of the same fears and resistances; thus, our individual self-condemnation eases, and we can become more willing to explore these fears and blocks, together. This togetherness creates a solid foundation upon which we can stand before the “wreckage of the past” (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 164) and peer into our pain/dysfunction. Attending to these inner wounds with the company of another makes the examination and repair more bearable. It makes healing more believable as well.

H.O.W. We Heal

*In order to feel fully human and unfold ourselves in our wonderfully human ways,
we need to know that our feelings are shareable and understandable -
that we can emotionally connect with others.
We need to be sure that our feelings matter.
The need to communicate, connect, belong
is inherent to the feeling process itself.*

Preston, 2001, www.focusing.org/fot/fot_articles.html

Recovery Focusing is based on my **H.O.W. We Heal** model for Focusing processing (Noel, 2010). This acronym stands for Honoring, Opening, and Welcoming. I developed this model for the Recovery Focusing work I was doing. My personal experience had shown me that starting and finishing a Focusing process with something positive actually made it more enjoyable, safe, and meaningful. I decided to do this in my work with groups at Costa Rica Recovery Center (2008-2014). This model moves through three phases that support the movement of

one to the other, much like a person holding our hand can help us balance as we step onto a sailboat. I start each of the group sessions with the **Honoring** phase, whereby we start the process with a positive felt experience. Resourcing ourselves in this way creates a net of safety that helps people feel contained (Parnell, 2013). Appreciating something positive in a felt sensed way lets the body itself feel substantially safer. It thus makes it easier to have a felt sense further on. It also enables the group to bond with a positive shared experience. Empathy, personal and group safety, and a sense of shared togetherness is established before moving into the exploration of the negative or stuck feeling or pattern. It's like making sure everything is in order before we go sailing on to visit unknown seas.

In the **Opening** phase, we explore and enter, in a Focusing way, whatever feeling or issue is needing our attention. In Recovery Focusing, we "open" an aspect of addiction, according to the particular Step we are working on. Once a felt sense is vividly present, "Shift" questions are used; such as *"What is the worst of this [felt sense]?"* and *"What does this [felt sense] need?"* (Gendlin, 1978; 1981 p. 58) These questions often help individuals discover new depths of experiencing. Because clients find their own answers to complex concerns from within their own selves, these insights have great personal value.

Finally, in the **Welcoming** phase we envision and bodily-experience "what could be." One of the shift questions Gendlin developed is, *"What would it feel like in my body if it were all okay, all whole and sound and fine?"* He writes, *"This is the method, par excellence, of freeing the body to feel totally alright, right now (while the*

problem is still unsolved). It is a way of feeling a little bit of "all solved" before there is a solution so that the solution steps can come." (Gendlin, 1978 p. 341) When the felt sense of "what could be" (Recovery/sobriety/healing) is present, we ask "What is the best of this?" This expands and furthers the positive feel of Recovery. By experiencing Recovery in the present moment (rather than having it as a distant concept), we are actually living, knowing, feeling what Recovery is! We are therefore more attracted to Recovery and more willing to do the work necessary to achieve it. We discover that it actually feels good. What a surprise to those of us who thought Recovery was an impossible, boring, lifeless task that could never replace the soothing benefits of our drug or behavior of choice. From this feeling totally alright and "all solved," as Gendlin writes, the "solution steps" can come -- the lighthouse beam is shining ahead to lead a safe way home.

With Recovery Focusing, this powerful H.O.W. process is applied to each of the Steps. The whole group starts with sensing into something positive before exploring the incapacitating feel of addiction. AND, every person is sharing their symbols and feelings of what it would be like for them to be "Recovered/sober/healed." The Recovery P.A.U.S.E. gains depth, height, and breadth in this expansive sharing of felt meaning.

As I sense inside, I see a handmade hanging bridge draped over high cliffs, with rocky, treacherous rapids below. The bridge is the Twelve Steps that lead us out of the scorching desert of addiction into the lush forest of Recovery. Felt Relating gives us the balance, clear sight, and self-confidence to hold on to the side ropes and

step on to the wooden boards. We are able to keep walking above the turbulence of our feelings and challenging situations, while our companions wait for us on the other side, cheering us on.

Opening Doors to Recovery

When you feel the body from the inside, there is a door.
Gendlin, 2000, p. 255

...for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last.
Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 75

Gendlin writes, *“But once you come in there and enter through this door, the whole space changes. An altogether different kind of space comes there after a while. It is an imagery space that is physically felt, but much larger than your body”* (Gendlin, 2000 p. 265). Below I review and summarize how the Recovery Focusing P.A.U.S.E., based on my H.O.W. model, changes the space of sobriety and opens possibilities to our personal and spiritual awakening:

- Time in Recovery is not an issue: we can all access our body wisdom to find relief and insights.
- The reality of addiction is assimilated, thus helping us break out of denial.
- Each person discovers their own individual meaning of each Step and of Recovery.
- The answers to what is needed come from within each person, reducing resistance to change and improving self-trust.
- Blocks to Recovery are transformed into stepping stones to healing. By being with what is in the way of moving forward, we make space for processing, revealing the next right step.
- Focusing allows us and our feelings to tell their story. There is no need to repress them, for they are gateways into interesting inner realms of experiencing.
- Self-empathy, empathy for others, and group empathy eases the self-loathing and shame associated with addiction. Empathic listening helps us feel understood and valued. It helps us listen to ourselves.
- Listening to each other creates shared, intricate meaning that carries our living forward.

- By listening empathically to others, we participate in their reparation as well, and this enhances self-esteem.
- Focusing is a gentle and natural aversion therapy, where the unpleasant felt sense of addiction (and the worst of it) creates an inner rejection of this addiction.
- The clear insights obtained through Focusing change our thinking, thus changing our affect and behavior. As our behavior changes, so does our thinking. The processes support one another.
- Experiencing the positive energy of Recovery gives people a lived instance of it and thus attracts them to it. Recovery is experienced as believable and doable.
- Felt Relating makes sharing in a group more significant than cognitive based processes.
- The tools of Recovery are enhanced and deepened with Focusing (see below).
- Not only does Focusing itself reduce stress, but the first step of classic Focusing, “Clearing a Space,” has been found to be a major stress reliever (Klagsbrun, 2008). Stress is a major cause of relapse (Gorsky, 2003).

As we see, Felt Relating and Recovery are natural allies in our search for meaning and connection. They share many of the same values and principles. They both unlock the healing potential of our life force. They show us a way of relating to ourselves, our situations, and each other that truly fills the empty “hole in the soul” with the aliveness of togetherness.

Integrating the P.A.U.S.E Into Our Program of Recovery

*As we go through the day we pause,
when agitated or doubtful,
and ask for the right thought or action.
Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 87*

The A.A. authors write, “All we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual program.” (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 85). Twelve steppers generally work a daily “Program of Recovery” in order to lower stress, to continue to mature emotionally, and to grow along spiritual lines. Generally, working a Program means we are working the Steps and practicing the new principles “in all our affairs.” Once again, these Steps are about improving our “conscious contact” with ourselves, others, and a Higher Power. Below I offer some suggestions on ways

that the Recovery Focusing P.A.U.S.E. may be integrated into a daily Program, particularly the last three “Maintenance Steps,” taken from my *Recovery Focusing Manual* (Noel, 2013). The Focusing Pause fortifies our Recovery by restoring our bodies and minds to serenity, where we can embrace our feelings and situations with a welcoming attitude.

Connecting With Ourselves

“Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”
(Step Ten, Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 59)

Morning Inventory. Each morning, we can pause to ask ourselves what our Recovery needs today and let doable action steps come from within. We can “Clear a Space” around what may be in the way of our Recovery or our serenity (Gendlin, 1978; 1981 p. 43).” Clearing a Space” means acknowledging what feelings, issues, or situations need our attention and placing each aside, gently finding the right distance between ourselves and what is disturbing us. It allows us to find a sense of our observer self and helps us dis-identify with our feelings or problems. Then, we can pick one of these and P.A.U.S.E. Processing in this Focusing way helps us start the day feeling lighter and more connected to our Program, to our Higher Self, and our Higher Power.

Pausing. Anytime we are uncomfortable or disturbed, we can call someone to listen respectfully while we Focus. Even if we can’t connect with anyone, we can P.A.U.S.E. to hold and be with our sense of urgency and process it. How might our

Higher Self or Higher Power be with all this? We can then share our experience with another person later to gain the benefits of sharing.

Writing from our inner parts. Allowing our inner “parts” to express themselves can be very helpful toward getting us in contact with our Higher Self (Whitfield, 1991). The Focusing Attitude of attending without judgment may show us if an inner character is needing to be heard.

Being in the Now. We can set some time aside to just sit and be with ourselves, sensing into our bodies, calmly waiting to sense if anything needs our attention. If a felt sense forms, we can be with it until it comes into “Focus,” relating to it in a curious, accepting way. We may link it to an issue or situation, or find the right empathy for it. A few minutes spent with our bodies in this way clears the way for the rest of the day.

Evening Inventories. We can do a Step Ten using the H.O.W. process. We “Honor” ourselves by reviewing what we did right, allowing a body sense of this to form. Then, we “Open” what we wish we would have done differently by attending to the felt sense of it, asking shift questions. Finally we “Welcome” recovery by letting ourselves imagine a healthy behavior which may replace our past action. Then, we Focus In, inviting our bodies to sense into how this would be, asking, *“What is the best of this felt sense?”* We appreciate and receive this body sense of Recovery.

When we uncover a “wrong,” we may ask ourselves, *“What is in the way of my promptly admitting this wrong?”* and be with what arises in a nonjudgmental way. Or, *“What kind of Self Empathy is needed while I make amends?”*

Starting the Day in the Light. We can start the day waiting for a way to be with ourselves today, as follows: We sense into our life context as it is now. We ask, *“How do I need to be with myself today? (Can I be kind, friendly, patient, forgiving, compassionate, supportive, etc.?)”* We wait for our body to answer. Finally, we invite a felt sense of this (friendliness, supportiveness, patience, etc.) to form. Maybe a gesture can help us feel this self-empathy (like holding or patting ourselves or placing our hand somewhere like our heart area, chest area, etc.) We keep our attention inside as we allow this feel of self-empathy to expand inside us. As mentioned above, this same self-empathy can be brought to ourselves with difficult situations or difficult feelings (and to the feeling/felt sense as well) (Noel, 2014).

Improving Our Conscious Contact with our Higher Power

“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood [God], praying only for knowledge [God’s] will for us, and the power to carry that out.”

(Step Eleven, Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 59.)

Focusing can open a space for the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual power to flow into us to carry out what needs to happen to continue healing. As previously mentioned, Clearing a Space, the first step of classic Focusing, is particularly helpful for reducing stress, a major cause of relapse (Klagsbrun, 2008, p. 213). It involves sensing the body from the inside and naming the issues that may be in the way of feeling OK. By gently placing them aside, we are better able to be more present and receptive to our Focusing process. Clearing a Space and other Focusing practices can be integrated into our daily practice of Step Eleven (prayer and

meditation), improving our conscious contact with a Higher Power of our choice.

Below are a few examples:

- Clearing a Space to enjoy the experience of being cleared and open inside, connected to our Higher Power.
- Clearing a Space to open the way to meditation.
- P.A.U.S.E.-ing to better integrate readings from a Daily Meditation book.
- Taking a moment to bodily-experience peace any time throughout the day.
- Practicing Honoring ourselves daily to increase our sense of appreciation.
- After writing a Gratitude List, we can P.A.U.S.E. to experience this wholeheartedly.

Another way of integrating Focusing into Step Eleven is by felt sensing while praying. We can pick a prayer and Focus into it or into parts of it. For example, any part of the Serenity Prayer (Niebuhr, Reinhold, 1891-1971) can be held in a Focusing way so that we experience it freshly, like the words “acceptance,” “serenity,” “courage,” or “wisdom.” Sensing into this moment’s felt sense of a prayer will infuse it with live meaning. As I sense into the whole of the Serenity Prayer now, what comes is a posture of outstretched arms, where my whole body is receiving the universe with full, heart-felt appreciation. I feel a spaciousness in my chest and a gentle energy moving up my spine. For this brief time, I have lived the Serenity Prayer, not just thought about it.

Connecting With Others

*“Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps,
we tried to carry this message to others
and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”*

(Step Twelve, Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 59)

Focusing Oriented Sponsorship: Sponsors are individuals in a Twelve Step fellowship who have worked the Steps and help newcomers to do so. As sponsors, we can invite newcomers/sponsees to P.A.U.S.E. We can guide them into their felt experience and offer reflective listening before adding our suggestions. We can pause ourselves before meeting with them to find what is needed, either for them or for ourselves, letting our inner wisdom reveal itself.

We can apply the H.O.W. Model to the Steps for our Sponsees as we help them work the Steps, inviting them to Honor themselves by acknowledging what they are doing to support their Recovery; Opening the Step with felt sensing to enhance the usual written Recovery work; and invite them to Welcome Recovery by envisioning how they would like to be in the future.

Co-Sponsorship through Focusing Partnership. Focusing Partnerships have been one of the most powerful supplements to my Recovery. For those who have long term Recovery that no longer need the same kind of firm sponsorship guidance through working the Steps, Recovery-Oriented Focusing Partnerships can support both individuals in exploring which Step (Recovery principle or value) may be applied to a given situation. Simply Focusing with a partner restores us to serenity.

“Focus-IN Recovery” circles. Twelve Steppers meet regularly in meetings. This is one of the primary ways we maintain our contact with others in Recovery. As we share our experience with others, our past gains in meaning. As we listen to

others share, we hear something we need to hear. We enjoy the relief of identification, knowing we are not alone. We often hear suggestions that show us action steps towards solving problems. Quite regularly, we gain perspective on our behavior and laugh with good humor at our mistakes. We are replacing the culture of addiction (where the group norm promotes addictive behaviors) with the culture of Recovery, which reinforces long term sobriety (White, 1996). We form new friendships, pick up new values and ways of relating, and overall change our language, music, eating habits, dress and appearance, etc. In effect, being a member of a Twelve Step fellowship gifts us with the social connections we need to move through the difficult changes of early Recovery and provides continued support as we progress on our journey. Focusing-Oriented Twelve Step meetings, Recovery-Oriented Focusing circles, or “Focus-In Recovery” circles can greatly enhance the benefits of fellowship. By introducing the intimacy and authenticity of Felt Sensing and Felt Listening into the group process, the whole experience gains in meaning and relevance.

RESTORING BODY/MIND/SPIRIT WHOLENESS

*You know you are not alone, but alive WITHIN some Larger Body
with a past and a future, with an energy, a source of wisdom
beyond what we are capable of thinking and manipulating—
a life-creative force that makes your sacrifices, even your suffering—meaning-filled.*
http://www.biospiritual.org/pages/Asilomar_Talk_-_Part_One.html

*As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence,
a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things,
we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction.*
Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 46

The Recovery Focusing P.A.U.S.E, within a safe interaction of a Recovery Focusing group or Focusing Partnership, can lead to significant, real, physical, mental, and spiritual change. Attending to and mending the festering wounds of addiction and trauma, Felt Relating leads us naturally into enjoying:

1. A new relationship to our body as the source of wisdom and wellbeing.
2. A new way of thinking freshly from our lived experience.
3. A new experience of grounded spirituality.

The P.A.U.S.E offers us a way to come home to our bodies. It frees our mind from the bondage of distorted thinking. By awakening our aliveness and spirit, the P.A.U.S.E. opens up a whole new dimension of living that supports and carries forward our Recovery. Felt Relating enlivens our connection to ourselves, others, and something greater than ourselves. This feeling of relatedness brings a grounded sense of belonging. The emptiness is now filled with a fully-embodied, solid sense of ourselves as a precious, unique, important part of the mystery of this magnificent living organism that is planet Earth. We experience silence as serenity, the peace of a life well lived. And all is well.

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