



# Focusing in Ireland

SPRING 2005

ISSUE 19

## Focusing on Philosophy:

Interest in a philosophical reading group surfaced in the Focusing Renewal Week in Glencomeragh when Gendlin's *Theory of Personality Change* was explored by all present. As a result of this, a group of us met in Dublin on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December.

The purpose of this group is to explore the philosophical foundation upon which focusing is built and which is implicit in the very practice of focusing itself.

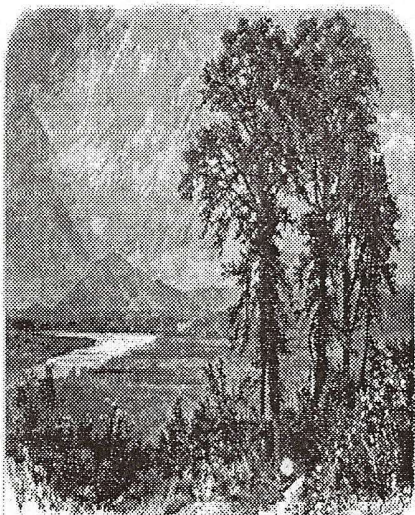
We decided to return to Gendlin's Doctoral Dissertation *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*. In this work Gendlin explores the notion of felt cognition and forwards a means by which we may speak meaningfully about it.

This reading group will be engaged in demystifying some of the intricate language of this work and opening up what forms freshly within all of us as we explore the very genesis of the practice of focusing.

This process is very similar to focusing in that we will be experiencing aspects of our implicit experience of focusing in a new and fresh way. We will also begin to experience philosophy in a new way i.e. not as something exclusively rational but as something that interacts with our body knowing of our own lived intricate experience.

The group is made up of seven focusers. Some more experienced than others, some with experience of philosophy, all bringing their own particular life experience to the discussion.

Our first meeting was particularly encouraging. It was wonderful to see how each person brought their own individual sense of what Gendlin was saying to the table. We plan to meet for ninety minutes every fortnight. It may take some time to get our minds and our bodies around



this work - but as we all agreed, it is the journey and not the destination that is important in this endeavour.

If there were interest from others in creating similar groups, I would be delighted to facilitate or assist any such enterprise.

John Keane.

## Irish National Focusing Conference 2005

Saturday 17th September.

**Venue:**  
All Hallows College,  
Drumcondra, Dublin.

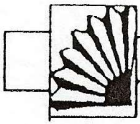
The day is a day to meet other focusers and to share. There will be information tables, workshops, a chance to do some focusing etc. The guest speaker will be Rob Foxcroft from Scotland.

The Conference will begin at 9.30am and finish at 6.00pm. Limited accommodation will be available at All Hallows for those who request it. All details will be available shortly. Enquiries to Adrian Farrelly.

087 2062122  
adrianfarrelly@hotmail.com

<b>INSIDE THIS ISSUE:</b>	<b>Focusing on Philosophy by John Keane</b>	<b>Pages 1</b>
	<b>Irish National Focusing Conference 2005</b>	<b>Page 1</b>
	<b>Widening our Spiritual Horizons by Mairead O'Brien</b>	<b>Pages 2</b>
	<b>What is Focusing? By Suzanne L. Noël</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
	<b>What is a Focusing Partnership</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
	<b>Focusing Facilitators in Ireland</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
	<b>Your Focusing Calendar</b>	<b>Page 4</b>





## WIDENING OUR SPIRITUAL HORIZONS

This title captures something of the quality of a recent workshop on Focusing and Spirituality offered by Kathleen Kavanagh and myself in our Focusing network. Our intent in planning the workshop was to provide a safe space for people to interact in a focusing way with the story of the Universe and with the Religious Traditions that have shaped our spiritual growth over the years.

The workshop began with a brief input on what is a vast and complex topic i.e. the story of the universe, a story which has become available in a new way through the research of scientists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This formed the context of the workshop, and an arrangement of visual images of the earth as seen from space by the astronauts, kept us reminded of that during the two days.

The opening input highlighted what Brian Swimme refers to as "the fundamental truth of contemporary science" i.e. the universe is a developing reality, its story is an evolutionary one, stretching way into the distant past (15 billion years) and unfolding at each moment into an unknown future. It is a story of majesty and beauty as well as of violence and disruption, a drama filled with both elegance and ruin.

Key aspects of the story were then pointed to:

- The vastness of the universe and the size of our planet by comparison. It was described by the astronauts as, "a pale blue dot".
- The nature of the earth, alive, pulsating with life and energy, the sight of it described by Edgar Mitchell as "a glimpse of Divinity".
- The inhabitants of the earth, billions of species who preceded humans by millions of years.
- The human family, the latest arrivals. "Here we are, born yesterday", newcomers into the earth community.
- The genetic closeness of humans to the other species, 90% of genes shared by some animals.
- The special gift that humans

bring, reflexive consciousness, the ability to reflect on experience, the experience of living in a world full of immensities, immersed in Mystery.

Aware, as focusers, that our bodies are doorways into this larger Mystery, we then took time in a guided exercise to touch into our individual responses to the input. A sense of feeling at home in the Universe story, feeling comfortable with it, stretched by it, a sense of widening, were some of the responses shared.

We then turned our attention to the religious symbols that have shaped our spiritual consciousness over the years. A selection of these from Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist traditions were on display in the room. These were reminders to us of a search for meaning and for ways to celebrate life's Mystery that our ancestors have engaged in for thousands of years. As we engaged in a focusing way with a symbol that attracted us just then, many memories and associations came and were later shared. What felt like the overriding sense however, was a sense of continuity, of valuing in a new way the history, the story these symbols embody, and a new awareness of our task i.e. to carry forward the search in this, our moment in history.

As we reflected in a focusing way on the reading from the Sunday Liturgy, we heard Paul remind his audience that Jesus, in his day, also carried forward the search, widening the circle of God's love to include other groups..

We spent some time also with the theme of values, those we regard as fundamental, e.g. life, identity, relationships, community, death. We reminded ourselves that these originate in and reflect the "laws" innate in the Universe itself i.e. interiority, differentiation and communion and the ongoing cycle of birth, death and rebirth. This confirmed our growing sense of the Universe as the source of every pattern, the reality that holds everything together.

We brought our workshop to a close with a ritual in which we added to the religious symbols on display new symbols taken from our natural environment and expressing

aspects of our experience of the workshop. This brought a sense of widening and we took time to be present in a focusing way, taking an open stance once again to the whole seamless evolutionary story that had engaged and inspired us during the two days. As we dispersed, we felt grateful for the story and for the fact that, with focusing, we have a special way to accompany ourselves and one another as we continue the great evolutionary unfolding of which we are a part.

Since the workshop, the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, wreaking destruction and devastation is a sharp reminder to us of the violent dimension of our evolutionary unfolding.

"The more closely we look at any place in the fifteen billion years of the universe's story, the more we realize that the universe is violent and creative, destructive and cooperative. The mystery is that both extremes are found together. We even find it difficult to determine when violence is simply destructive or when it is linked to creativity" (The Universe Story)

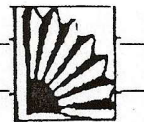
As focusers, taking an open stance to how this violent episode impacts on us and inviting a felt sense of the whole ongoing story, not only its violent and destructive episodes but also its beauty and immensity, will help us find our own specific sense of its meaning for us. In this way we make space for new understandings to come, a new and deeper sense of the Mystery of it all.

*Mairead O'Brien Focusing Facilitator*

*Check out the website*

*For further reading around spirituality check The Focusing Institute's website at [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org) for articles such as: Focusing and Judaism, Focusing and Spiritual life and Focusing and Buddhism. Pete Campbell and Ed McMahon of the Institute for BioSpiritual Research also have their own website at [www.biospiritual.org](http://www.biospiritual.org)*





## WHAT IS FOCUSING?

As I hold the experience of "focusing" in my mind, I feel a light, expansive rising in my chest that pleases me. It is a soft, feather-like feeling resting, no..., rising from my chest.

Ah yes, the rising. Focusing is a "rising above" of sorts for me by going within.

I feel a cool pleasure right in the center of my chest, an opening in my throat that comes with a swelling of joy that feels like tears. I am grateful for the opening that focusing has given me, the space to express myself with a safe other.

I hold "safe other" now in my mind, for focusing involves a partnership of trading turns listening and focusing with a trained focusing partner. I see accepting eyes holding me, understanding, accompanying me.

I feel excitement, again in my chest. The excitement of being listened to, and the healing this brings. I say "Yes" in my being, remembering the grateful, happy feeling of my "yes, yes" when I hear my partner reflect back to me what I say. This reflection. My mirror of myself. Hold-healing/accepting.

But now, I feel a stone, an unpleasant black stone, shaped perhaps like an arrowhead, ah yes, arrowhead....well, an old arrowhead, chipped out of black onyx, ancient tool/weapon.. holding a wound... A wound that has turned into a black arrowhead in my throat, yes, (and with this a lot of "stuff" comes about attack and sharp tongues and hard edges....a flood of many things I could follow in the session,

but I stay with my throat...and...) a release there in the throat and an image of a partner blowing breath into it to turn it into a live coal! Yes, breathing life into it.

Now it is not a sharp, shiny, black onyx arrowhead: Now it is warm and red and alive with inner heat, this in my throat, and my throat feels VERY OPEN now. Deep breath. My head is nodding in a deep yes, receiving the ALL THIS of focusing and focusing partnership.

I am knowing a deep peace. A blissful peace.

I have insight now, into THIS moment's felt experience of focusing. I see that focusing enables me to rise above my daily problems by going within, and it heals my wounds with the breath of another, my partner. I know more will come spontaneously later with all of this, after only three minutes of focusing.

This, then, is focusing.

It is a practice of going within and WAITING. Waiting for a "felt sense" to form somewhere in the body that comes forth from the issue/problem/situation that one has chosen to focus on. By being with and relating to this felt sense, the body shifts, releases, changes in the way it was "holding" the issue, and insight and a feeling of lightness may arise.

It is a journey.

One may enter images, felt movements, strong physical sensations, metaphors, sounds, etc. -- all "handles" or symbols for the deeper felt experience. It is often quite fascinating and usually very surprising. It definitely is hard to explain. One must do it to know it. And keep doing it to know it better.

Why do it?

Because of the shift. The release. The forward movement in one's life that naturally unfolds from this gentle attention one gives to oneself. This "Presence" to our deeper knowing leads us to our wisdom and our joy. We start changing. Feeling real and grounded and more connected to greater things.

Yes.

Focusing is like a spiritual awakening that empowers me in a very practical way to be here now...and enjoy!

It has changed everything for me. Everything. One little shift at a time.

*Suzanne L. Noël Certified Focusing Guide & Trainer*

*The above appeared in the focusing discussion list recently. This list can be accessed at [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org)*

## What is a Focusing Partnership?

Many people all over the country have a focusing partnership. This means that they receive a half hour of attention from another person, and then they give the person a half hour of their attention, at least once a week at a regular time, either in person or on the phone.

Most people use the time to work on their main concerns that day, which might be inner experiences, their attempts to develop as people, or a difficult letter to write, the next thing to do in one's work, or whatever one finds uppermost.

Your partner offers no advice, no judgments, no comments. We have learned that people can go deeper and arrive at creative steps forward, if the listener refrains from adding anything in. Judgments, advice and comments express the person who is giving them, not the person to whom one is listening. Your partner will not say that your talk is superficial, or that it doesn't make sense, or that you are wrong, weak, or selfish, nor will the partner praise one thing and condemn another thing in you, or in what you say.

Partners need only say when they cannot follow you, so that you can rephrase what you said. But they pay close attention, and want to grasp every wrinkle of what you meant. There is no attempt to delve or probe or push more deeply into what you said. What counts is *what you meant to say*, what you *wanted* to convey.

Sometimes partners may repeat back and check: "You are saying .....". Of course they don't just repeat words. First they take in what you said, feel it in themselves, until that nodding "uhuh yes, makes sense". comes. *Only then* they might say it back, so that you can feel it and correct it, until it is exactly what you meant to convey. This "reflective listening" is a skill that anyone can learn. But most partners simply indicate when they have followed you, and when not.

You will find that you are with yourself in a way that is not possible most of the time, because other people usually need and demand something, or impact on you in some way. Neither can you sense yourself as deeply and easily when you are alone.

The above is an excerpt from the article, "what is a Focusing Partnership" which is available on [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org)