

Joan Lavender's Posts from GoodTherapy.com:

Experiential Theory: Psychotherapy's Well-Kept Secret

"This is a healing. I haven't allowed myself to heal. I didn't understand it. I mean I heard what people said when they said this, but I didn't understand it - until now."

Independent filmmaker

At significant moments in sessions, we pay attention to the nuances of our patient's experiential process as it is conveyed by through their verbal and nonverbal communication; and we rely on our own experiential process for our vital clinical intuition. We listen *through* these levels to grasp what our patient is experiencing. It is inconceivable to consider the practice of psychotherapy without paying careful attention to experiential process.

But what is meant *by experiential process*? Are there different levels of experiential process i.e. what does it mean when we say that someone is "too much in their head" or, for that matter, too much in their feelings? What makes one psychotherapy *really* experiential and another less so? Does experiential process have its own natural properties? If such properties exist, how can we know them? These are philosophical and theoretical questions of great value to clinicians.

This article is the first of a series introducing you to Eugene Gendlin's philosophy of experiencing, its theoretical principles and its clinical applications. As a philosopher and phenomenologist, Gendlin makes a rare contribution to our work because he addresses ontological questions about the nature of experiencing itself. While a growing number of clinicians, from different schools of psychotherapy, know the clinical value of his Experiential Focusing method, the philosophy itself is less well known. Ahead of its time, it can now be seen as providing an intellectual holding environment for some of the latest developments in intersubjectivity theory, self-psychology, trauma work and what is now called the philosophy of the Implicit.

My plan in this introduction is to give a brief background to Gendlin's thought and then to show you how his conceptualization of the natural "laws" of experiential process have direct application to our work with patients.

Gendlin is a philosopher who collaborated with Carl Rogers when they met in 1952 at the University of Chicago. Gendlin's first major work **Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning** (1962) introduced the experiential dimension when he went on to say that, based on his research (see below re The Experiencing Scale), that client-centered therapy was not enough. Rogers acknowledged this, citing Gendlin's contributions to his own article called "On a process conception of psychotherapy (Rogers, 1958, p. 142). Gendlin went on, beyond the person-centered approach, to describe his view of experiencing in what now is called the implicit dimension of meaning and "implicit knowing".

Gendlin and his collaborators discovered that patients who showed no progress in therapy didn't seem to have a capacity to "refer inward" in a particular way. Gendlin designed a way to capture and teach this natural process to anyone interested in working with their inner experiencing. In order to test the validity of the Focusing method, Gendlin and Hendricks developed The Experiencing Scale, a statistically reliable method

of measuring levels of experiencing. In the last twenty years, Experiential Focusing has been cited as an excellent example of a micro unit of naturally occurring human change process (Patterns of Change), that can be worked with across most approaches to psychotherapy.

Consider this: You have within you – “beneath” your everyday practical use of language – another dimension, an inner language – that is an imagistic dialogue between you and your immediate experiencing. It is you speaking to yourself (and listening to yourself) in your own code. Gendlin calls it the “zigzag” between the everyday use of language and the way we may actually hold our experiencing in a “bodily felt” way.

We start the process when some situation in our lives - something we “find ourselves in” - feels stuck or painful. The problem beckons to us in a bodily way. We want to move into the place where meanings can reconstellate. To touch into this realm, we sit quietly, eyes lowered, with attention inside. We let form how exactly the situation touches us, how it is meaningful to us but in an implicit way, not in words. You might say that It finds *a way to let* itself develop explicitly.

By staying still yet alert, our inner sensing seems to order itself; bodily-felt senses (to be defined in the next article) carry within them a palpable sense of significance. As we let them come to us (we cannot in fact go after them!) they prioritize themselves. In a way, they tell us what we need to be attending to. As we hold them in our awareness, we let our words speak directly from our immediate sense of them. And, as this happens, something starts to happen, however subtle. Something starts to dawn on us. Our usual way of holding a situation starts to open – but it’s not only the situation. It is the way we “hold” the situation. We notice a palpable change. This was a good moment in a good therapy session.

If the above description seems familiar to you, that is probably because you have access to your own creative process; you refer to it without needing to how it might work. The process has its own palpable efficacy. If you are taken by the process, Gendlin’s philosophy in action, you might over time find yourself “living the practice”.

Gendlin’s worldview has helped me to sit with the pauses, stuck place and moments of uncertainty that are intrinsic to life, including to my life’s work as a psychotherapist. His view of the human universe lends a beauty to the process of meaning making, helping our patients and ourselves stay alive to the creative process that makes good therapy.

My first attempt to describe the micro process of experiencing will be refined in further articles. In my next article, I will use clinical examples to demonstrate Gendlin’s principles so you can see them in action.

A Closer Look at Bodily-Felt Sensing, the Heart of Gendlin's Experiential Philosophy

In my first piece, I said "we want to move into the place where meanings can reconstellate...we sit quietly, eyes lowered, with attention inside". But what precisely are we paying attention to?

We are paying attention to the forming or coalescing of an internal phenomenon Gendlin calls Bodily-Felt Sensing or bodily-felt experiencing. Since BFS is a central concept in Gendlin's philosophy, (and is best grasped when sensed directly) I want to be clear conceptually about what it is and what it is not.

Suggestion: Gendlin's construct of BFS is a holistic unity that cannot be divided into the traditional divisions of mind and body. If you are reading Gendlin from a Cartesian, separate mind/separate body it may take you some time to grasp how BFS is different. I think of it as the smallest indivisible micro-unit of experiential process.

Each of the descriptions below emphasizes different aspects of this central concept:

"A felt sense typically forms in the trunk area of the body, as an unclear but tangible sensation. If attended to directly where it forms in the body, a felt sense can respond with new meanings, confirmed with shifts in the bodily feeling". (Barnett, L. & Madison, G.)

Sills describes BFS as a kind of "*global perception of the whole of arising process (my italics) in any one moment of emergent experience* – a sense of "all of it". All those sensations, emotional tones, mental constructs, symbols and images that compose our self-constellations are directly experienced as an embodied and coherent whole."

"A felt sense is not (only) a mental experience but a physical one. Physical. A bodily awareness of a *situation or person or event. An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time-encompasses it and communicate it to you all at once* rather than detail by detail. A felt sense doesn't come to you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (though often puzzling and very complex) feeling."(Gendlin, G., 1981)

At any moment he wishes, one can refer directly to an inwardly felt datum. Experiencing, in the mode of being directly referred to in this way, I term the "direct referent . . . At first it may seem that experiencing is simply the inward sense of our body, its tension, or its well being. *Yet, upon further reflection, we can notice that only in this direct sensing do we have the meanings of what we say and think. For, without our "feel" of the meaning, verbal symbols are only noises (or sound images of noises).*"(Gendlin, E.T.), 1964.

"Focusing is a way of paying attention to one's being-in-the-world, one's interaction as it is experienced through the individual (*but not separate*) body. *A felt sense is a temporary wave from the sea of being - it is understood as on-going process, not 'internal content'*" This initially unclear bodily feeling is referred to as the 'felt sense'. It is physically felt, more than clearly defined emotion, and incorporates a whole constellation of this and other

situations, now and other times, self and others, elaborated by language. By staying with a felt sense, a shift in meaning may eventually occur that brings a physically felt relief in the way the body holds that issue. (Madison, G.)

With practice, the phenomenon of BFS can be identified distinctly, by both focuser and listener. It is accessed through the body, as an epiphenomenon of our experiencing self, yet is not localizable in the physical body proper. You can recognize BFS by its potential to move, to change or to shift.

What a Bodily Felt Sense is NOT

1. It is not sheer emotion, yet **includes** emotions within it.
2. It is not “pure” thought, yet **includes** thinking within it.
3. It is not purely physical, yet **includes** physical sensations within it.
4. It is not imagery, yet **includes** imagery within it.
5. It is not memory, yet **includes** memories within it.

This “temporary wave, from the sea of being” is embedded in a worldview that has implications for our notions of relationality and communication, as I will explain in the next chapter.

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Sills, Maura, “In this body, a fathom long...”. In *About a Body, Working with the Embodied Mind in Psychotherapy*. (Eds.) Corrigan, J., Payne, H., Wilkinson, H., Routledge, London & New York, pp. 199-213. It is not what was meant by primary process.

Gendlin's View of Human Being: Interaction First

My last piece on Focusing ended with a definition of felt sensing as a “temporary wave, from the sea of being” (Madison, G.). What is meant by a temporary wave from the sea of being?

It is time to introduce Gendlin's **conception** of human being. Note that I said 'human being', not 'a human being'. For Gendlin, human being is “interbeing”- what we think of as an **individual** being is a “livings in the world, and living with” (Gendlin 1978-79). He calls this principle Interaction First.

Gendlin conceives of human beings experientially not as separate “things” in interaction with each other. More radically, he sees our environments and us as a **continuous co-creative** process. We are not “inside our skins, but are our living-in the world, and living-with others.(Gendlin 1978-79). Even our physical being is a continuous process with its inner and outer environments. Hence, in his view, it is impossible to conceive of human being as a separate entity. We are interbeing.

What is a living body such that it has the intricacy of our situations? ... With the old concepts, people might say that Focusing is "subjective." But clearly, if the situation is carried in the body, then a felt sense is not subjective. Objective then? No, also not, since "objective" means the units and patterns to which science limits anything it studies. We could fashion a new sentence that is neither subjective, nor objective, nor both: The body IS an interaction process with the environment, and therefore the body IS its situations. The body isn't just a sealed thing here, with an external situation over there, which it merely interprets. Rather, even before we think and speak, the living body is already one interaction process with its situation. The situation is not out there, nor inside. The external "things" and the subjective "entities" are derived from one single life-interaction process (which they always bring along with them). (Gendlin 2004).

This is a radical view and paradigm shift that is difficult to absorb. We are used to thinking about ourselves and the environment “around us” through the lens and language of a Cartesian world. We are imbued with philosophical assumptions idealizing objectivity and neutrality and a mechanistic relationship of mind over body. For example, we may have heard of such concepts as the “observer effect” , yet we go about living in a way that leaves context out of the equation.

For Gendlin, the making of meaning is a pluralistic, contextual, constructed process; it is *changing* and dynamic, not static and eternal (Mitchell 1993). Our lived bodily sense of things is a function of our interbeing and our capacity for felt sensing extends us beyond the confines of our delimited physical body.

Recall that I started my first piece by saying that you have within you – “beneath” your everyday practical use of language –another dimension, an inner language – that is an imagistic dialogue between you and your immediate experiencing. It is you speaking to yourself (and listening to yourself) in your own code. Gendlin calls it the zigzag between the everyday use of language and the way we may actually hold our experiencing in a bodily felt way.

Gendlin says that this kind of processing exists preconceptually, beneath our everyday use of language and concepts and the assumptions we have about how the world works. In Focusing, we find our own language and meaning that is in fact much more specific and precise than our usual use of language. We find language from the sea of our being.

A client with a traumatic history sits quietly, with eyes lowered, pausing to find a way to articulate why his time in boarding school (60 years ago!) is still so meaningful to him. His life before boarding *school was* consumed by his father's collapse into psychosis. He is sensing into the situation re boarding school - without any explicit reference to his catastrophic childhood history. After a full few minutes of silence, he finds one word that fits –life at boarding school was “manageable”. At the point that he says “manageable”, tears come to his eyes. He doesn't know why, but his felt sense tells him, preconceptually, that “manageable” feels right.

The therapist, attuning to her client, takes in “manageable, and acknowledges it. As it resonates within her, she realizes how much is contained in this word “manageable” for her client. Then she drifts into her own felt sense of his childhood and finds ‘unmanageable’ Experientially embedded in the world of her client's meaning making, the therapist quietly offers the newly emerging word “unmanageable” without any reference to his history, and the client considers it.

A few moments later, the client's full catastrophe of life with his father's illness impacts him, but in a different way. His therapist has offered a word that touches into his world precisely and with great specificity. What is captured here - in two words – manageable and unmanageable, is much more than the common meaning of *these words*. *The client is referring to the experiential world of living-with and living-in his father's psychosis, as well as to the emergent significance of what boarding school provided for him.* The unmanageable and the manageable.

Notice that the felt sensing came first. With “manageable, he has begun to capture the world of his experiencing – the profound relief of finding himself for the first time in a world that he could handle (boarding school). Then, unmanageable is intoned, and he resonates with the years of struggling with the catastrophe of his father's psychosis. ‘Manageable’ arose as a temporary wave from the sea of being. ‘Unmanageable’ emerged from their shared sea of being. And this shared moment deepens their therapeutic journey.

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Creation of the Experiential Environment

“The therapist’s presence and responses as an experiencing person have an inescapable influence on the interaction and thus also on the client’s [phenomenology](#).”

(Rice & Greenberg p. 216)

If you have read my three earlier pieces (Goodtherapy.org), you already know about Gendlin’s philosophy i.e. experiencing, bodily felt-sensing, interaction first, as well as his view of progress in psychotherapy. Gendlin is saying is that *whatsoever the therapist conveys to the patient i.e. understanding, interpretation, his own observation*, it must be taken in and passed through the patient’s experiential process. The same goes for *the patient’s own ideas, interpretations, previous understandings, fixed ideas about his own issues*, they too must be subject to and passed through his experiential process. In his view, the patient’s phenomenology is the final arbiter of what actually feels meaningful to him. There is no substitute for this.

Rice and Greenberg (p. 15), *studying psychotherapy process*, arrived at a similar conclusion. They identify the move from speaking about oneself to speaking from a “felt reference” as one that many different therapy orientations would recognize as a turning point in therapeutic work. (Please bear in mind that the term felt reference, for Gendlin, is not equivalent to emotions, or feelings; my earlier writing will clarify this crucial definition for you.) They go on to state “that interventions that facilitate particular client mechanisms of change only work in the relationship climates that are conducive to the type of client performances required to set these mechanisms in motion”.

It is the therapist’s responsibility to create the kind of environment that makes this happen.

Creating the Experiential Environment

What is the inescapable influence on the patient that happens as a result of being an experiencing therapist?

I do not think that the patient is changed by which tool I choose from my toolkit; nor do I think it is necessarily about who I am as a person.

It is about how I think of human being, as entity formed *from continuous process*, as both, that shifts my perception, creating the environment we need for our work. I have to be the climate that furthers my patient’s process. If, as Gendlin says, there *are two individuals creating one system (including smaller systems, and existing within larger systems)*, I have to be a kind of experiencing system that makes a difference for my patient.

When I enter my office, I see the apparent fact of our physical separateness, yet I sense the permeability and process aspects of our sitting together. Perhaps it is something like this – each of us appears solid from a distance, yet as we get closer, just like with a microscope, it is more like a density of processes in living action, inextricably in relation.

In order for me to lend myself to the creation of an experiential environment, I need the right blend of intactness and permeability. This balancing act, so essential to human relating, is nowhere near fully under my control; I have to go with what comes each time.

I am exquisitely vulnerable to shifts of mood and attunement. My internal” filter” needs to be free to flutter (open and close) as prompted by the flow of our being together. If am preoccupied or anxious, my internal filter will be closed off, keeping me too intact and not permeable. If I am too open, I will fall into my experiencing and not be able to articulate from it. All of these fluctuations will of course be felt in the room - implicitly.

My sense of you, the listener, affects my experiencing as I speak, and your response partly determines my experiencing a moment later. What occurs to me, and how I live as we speak and interact, is vitally affected by every word and motion you make, and by every facial expression and attitude you show....

...It is not merely a matter of what I think you feel about me. Much more, I am affected even without stopping to notice it yet every response you give me, I experience your responses. ...Thus is it not the case that I tell you about me, and then we figure out how I should change, and then somehow, I do it. Rather, I am changing as I talk, and think and feel, for your responses are every moment part of my experiencing, and partly affect, produce, symbolize and interact with it. (Gendlin, 1962, pp. 38-39)

I imagine our experiential environment as a surrounding medium that we can dip into to grasp the finely grained “underbelly” of whatever issues my patient brings into his session. I foster this by saying, “let me take that in, see if I can really sense where you are coming from” or “please tell me if I’ve got it the way you meant it”. Or, “you seem to be checking if what you said really fits with what you are noticing inside right now”. These comments point the patient to the presence of **their** felt-reference or to our shared one, or even, sometimes, to how they sense me to be doing in a given moment.

In such a mode, I feel different from the inside, and am told that I seem different too. I find myself sitting, speaking, and even inhaling differently. The languaging and rhythm of my responses are different, as is the look of my face (I am told). When I am seen and sensed as coming from a felt-sensed dimension, this has a subliminal effect on the “living-with” milieu. A new client told me, toward the end of her first session, that her previous therapist, while listening sensitively, seemed to be listening “across an emotional distance from the other **side of the room**. **“It feels like you are sitting close to me and my words, I can see it on your face”**.”

Experiential Listening

I am listening from an inner place that scans for rhythm, inflection, pregnant pauses – listening to what might be implied or embedded. A colleague described it this way:

I am aware of listening somewhat differently than I would have in the past. I am listening with different antennae. ... the new antennae are alert to a different set of signals. They are scanning not so much for the "what might this relate to" as for the "what is already there". What is already in the immediate moment of experience, implicitly present thought not yet articulated? (Griefer, L., personal communication).

Structure Bound vs. In Process

There are a few reasons why I shift my perception in the way *I* described above. One way to describe it is to breathe life into an experiential life support system for (or ideally with) the patient. This may sound dramatic but I often feel, especially with patients who have difficulty letting new meaning emerge, that I am a kind of emotional breathing machine, an extra lung.

But there is much more than this.

When I listen this way I am priming myself to be an open system. If I am listening in a way that is "structure bound", my system will not allow me to resonate with the dimension of the patient's preconceptual perception. Instead, I will respond to my patient's language in a way that does not allow me to hear him "in process". This fixity in me will not let me hear what he might be striving to convey or what he now might be on the verge of holding differently. I will be hearing the same old content bound into its literal meaning. I need *the experiential environment to open* my own filter to be able to listen for my patient's newly emerging meaning.

Unless my experiences implicitly function so that I can newly understand you, I cannot really understand you at all. Insofar as my experiencing is structure bound, it does not implicitly function. It is not "seamlessly" felt by me with its thousands of implicit aspects functioning so that I arrive at some fresh meaning, (Gendlin, 1964, Section 17)

Let's see if I can explain this by going back to Gendlin's ideas about the value of the experiencing therapist. Remember that felt sensing arises from the preconceptual realm, (Gendlin calls this the unseparated multiplicity), that gives fresh connotative meaning to the phrases and words we select carefully when we speak from our direct experiencing. Connotation means the suggesting of a meaning by a word apart from the thing it explicitly names or describes. We imbue words with connotative meaning, depending on the context they are embedded in. When language is used in this manner, it evokes or suggests images, memories and emotions.

The words and phrases themselves are the same garden variety ones we use in every day speech. When used per usual, they carry generic meaning. But when they come from felt sensing they go beyond this function to carry the unique implications and connotations that resonate with each individual's unique world of meanings. When personal meaning is reconfigured this way, there is a reverberation throughout the person's experiential world. The patient feels it in his bones.

As we tell this person (the therapist) some old, familiar, many times repeated story, we find it richer and freshly meaningful, and we may not get all the way through it for the many facets of personal meaning, which now unfold.

(http://www.focusing.org/gendlin/docs/gol_2145.html)

Here is an example of a patient resonating deeply with her own experiential process. (In this case, she needs nothing more from me but my experiencing presence.) She is surprised by what she finds herself saying.

Pt: I'm taking the risk of being happy. Long silence. (Sensing inward). I feel dazed.....(more silence).

J: Do you mind if I sit a bit closer, it helps me listen better?

B: (nods yes) dazed....like it will all go away...but like something inside is building...allowing it to have more meaning....(B. touches her chest in a distinct area)....something bizarre here?no, bizarre isn't it...it's a feeling of....strength...oh!....this is very different than what I was experiencing in my stomach before.....this is areinforcement...a pillar....it started weak and small....I have been building this! It's like I have someone holding me up...hmmmit's me!...hmmmm....it's not easier...I mean, it's not that life gets easier...it's that I have more inner strength. It's not about being tough or not tough...it's something I have to take in. You mentioned an inner path before...this is brand new....it's about succeeding...but internally.

This is a healing. I haven't allowed myself to heal. I didn't understand it, I mean I heard what people said when they said this, but I didn't understand it until right now!

Process Intimacy

The evolution of any comment I might wish to say to my patient comes to me freshly *through my own felt-sensing process*. If I have something to say that might be a furthering of what my patient has been implying, I want to demystify not only what I say but also how I arrived at it. I make my “interpretive process” transparent. After all, it is the same fundamental capacity that is available (or potentially available) to the patient. I might string together previous moments of significance and say something like “you were sitting with such a sadness that I could feel it too, that came up when you felt I you were disappointing me. Patient responds “yeah, and I'm remembering that same sadness when my big sister got disappointed in me, for the **first time....**”. **In such moments**, the patient's sense of being deeply understood is touched, as the therapeutic bond is deepened.

From the Patient's Side

Thus far I have been writing about the experiential environment from the therapist's perspective. What happens with the structure bound person, or the one who responds concretely? Aren't they also co-creating an environment? Or am I imposing a demand on such a person to be other than they way they are? Am I like the caterpillar in Alice in Wonderland, aloft upon the lily pad, hookah and all, intoning “WHO.... ARE.... YOU?”

Although I have written thus far from the therapist's perspective, this should not be taken as therapistocentric. Because the patient and I are a living-with, a living-in, the experiential environment clues me into the unique sensibilities of whomever I am sitting across from.

For the natural focusers, we move easily into the experiential environment. If I am having a bad day and am unable to do my part, their experiential spaciousness can carry me through. Other people “inhale” the environment over time. One client liked to call it “consulting her entrails”.

Concreteness suggests to me that the emotional reverberation (significance) of their words has become detached or drained off from the vitality of its original source. The words are there but the juice is drained off. Smith-Johnsson, (1997, p. 464) discussing alexithymia, suggested that such patients “lack emotional anchorage within themselves” suggesting that they cannot access the essence of their own inner state, as well as those of others. In such situations I feel an especially compelling urge to provide an emotional lifeline for the patient by sustaining an experiential environment. I shift to a state of extreme attunement where the slightest nuance in movement, eye contact, and phrasing might be an opportunity to inflate a flattened inner state. Or I breathe in their words, taking it into my emotional lung, and share where it took me. Or we simply stay on their level, and look for meaning in other arenas of our therapeutic time together.

A final example

A specific image - of my own analyst – comes to mind. Her quiet involvement in her own experiential process as she sat with me had the natural effect of bringing me down into my own. And coming down into myself enriched the evolution of our relationship. She trusted herself and me enough to have a “process intimacy” (Lavender, 2009) with me. She was listening to herself, deeply, while she was listening to me. My insides knew this immediately, as if we were breathing, emotionally, together. This made us close. No longer floundering above myself, I could ease into my own experiential realm.

Toward a Definition of the Experiential Environment

An experiential environment is a state of being (a paradox in itself) in which one is deeply in tune with the process aspects of human being. In psychotherapy such an environment furthers our work by sustaining a bodily felt reference level with whatever issue is being discussed. This carries us from the distinctly felt yet not yet articulated - the implicit – to the horizon line of new meaning.

It is the therapist’s job to create an experiential environment that can touch into her patient’s capacity to speak from such a level, while acknowledging the uniqueness of each patient’s sensibilities and needs.

When the therapist engages her own bodily felt sensing to resonate with her patient’s words, stories, she is cultivating an experiential environment. When the patient discovers (or rediscovers) this same capacity in herself, and finds it an endless source of guidance, meaning, beauty and awe, this is an affirmation of the experiential environment.

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The Preseparated Multiplicity – The Primal Density

In my 2nd piece, A Closer Look at Bodily Felt Sensing, I included a variety of descriptions of this phenomenon. I did this purposely because the concept itself, being experiential, is fundamentally impossible to put into words i.e. it inherently defies verbal description. So I gave you a series of attempts to get at it, some directive, some imagistic. I wanted you to start to get a feel for the distinctive features of felt sensing.

Let us take one of these in more detail. Sills describes bodily felt sensing as a kind of global perception of the whole of ‘arising process’ in any one moment of emergent experience, a sense of “all of it” (Sills, 2006, p. 203).

What is the ‘all of it’? Gendlin’s term for the kind of datum that is accessed through felt sensing is the ‘preseparated multiplicity’ and the ‘more’ than can be sensed, always in process and not ever fully communicated through words. It can be thought of as prereflective or preconceptual knowing. It is a kind of knowing that exists before it is divided into the logic and categories of language.

When one starts to speak from the ‘more’ it is accessed from a dimension of awareness that is slightly altered. It is sensed bodily, kinesthetically, first as murky or vague conceptually. It is sensed as a complex whole, like an internal atmosphere or mood. While it is conceptually unclear, it is felt to be distinctly there. This is the realm of the implicit i.e. something is understood but not clearly stated.

As one senses further into the “more” it becomes more precise, more distinct, more evocative, and unique to the person/situation. But, Gendlin states, it is not given in convenient cognitive units. (Gendlin, 1997, p. 16). It moves in phrases and steps, characterized by an opening to new meaning that is called felt shift. Such shifts occur spontaneously and move the focuser in a direction that feels like growth. They seem to follow a natural ordering process, although the nature of that process has not been defined. It can be tracked by the visceral response of the focuser.

Let’s revisit our example of the young woman from my fourth piece on the Experiential Environment as she moves into her implicit dimension. (I will put my comments in brown).

Pt: I’m taking the risk of being happy. Long silence. (Sensing inward). I feel dazed.....(more silence).

J: Do you mind if I sit a bit closer, it helps me listen better?

B: (nods yes) dazed....like it will all go away...but like something inside is building...allowing it to have more meaning....(B. touches her chest in a distinct area)....something bizarre here? (vague, trying out words).....no, bizarre isn’t it....it’s a feeling of....strength (she is fitting words to felt sensing)...oh!....this is very different than what I was experiencing in my stomach before (something has shifted already).....this is areinforcement...a pillar (a spontaneous image)...it started weak and small....I have been building this! It’s like I have someone holding me up....hmmmit’s me!...hmmmm....it’s not easier...I mean, it’s not that life gets easier...it’s that I have more inner strength (she has produced her own understanding, with resonance). It’s

not about being tough or not tough...it's something I have to take in. You mentioned an inner path before...this is brand new....it's about succeeding...but internally.

This is a healing. I haven't allowed myself to heal. I didn't understand it, I mean I heard what people said when they said this, I didn't understand it until right now!

In revisiting this vignette with you, I am struck by the beauty and scope of what she finds for herself from her dip into this realm. Certainly this kind of knowing yields a profound understanding that enlivens her in the session and in her life.

It moves me to share with you the writing of Stephen Mitchell, the inspirational founder of contemporary relational psychoanalysis. He is writing about how his own view of human being, deeply influenced by Hans Loewald, a psychoanalytic visionary from a previous era, who had studied directly with Heidegger.

I think you will hear the resonance (as well as some of the distinctions) of Mitchell's conception with Gendlin's worldview.

Cosmologists tell us that our universe began in a primal density in which all the structures and differentiations we take for granted were collapsed in on one another. ...Perhaps it is not too fanciful to think of psychoanalysts as astronomers and cosmologists of the mind. Patients begin treatment with fragments, pieces of a life that seems bounded and separate from one another; symptoms, current "reality" problems, memories, dreams, and fantasies. Psychoanalysts have learned to think of these seemingly bounded fragments in psychic space as constituents of a single force field (Mitchell, 2003, p. 4). Like contemporary cosmology, it begins with a primal density in which all of the features of our everyday world, which we take to be separate, bounded elements, are collapsed in on one another. We begin, Loewald suggests, with experience in which there is no differentiation between inside and outside, self and other, actuality and fantasy, past and present. All these dichotomies, which we come to think of as givens, a basic feature of the way the world simply is, are for Loewald, complex constructions. They arise slowly over the course of our early years and operate as an overly, a parallel mode of organizing experience that accompanies and coexists with experiences generated by the original primal unity. That earliest form of experience, Loewald suggests, never disappears. It underlies the later differentiations and bounded structures that make adult life possible. That original and continuing primal density, in Loewald's vision mind, operates as "hidden matter", trying together dimensions of experience that only appear to be fully separate, bounded and disconnected.

Is this not Gendlin's pre-separated multiplicity?

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