

Blue Sky Focusing (Space Presencing)

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For a long time, I have studied and practiced Focusing, and I continue to do so. I was stubborn about making sure that Experiencing, the baseline of Focusing, happens in Focusing sessions. I believe that the core of Focusing is Experiencing as it happens in a personal relationship. At the same time, I am personally interested in meditation as well, and my doctorate was in the physiology of relaxation (Autogenic Training).

In meditation, I am influenced by mindfulness. Recently, I have been particularly fond of *Updating Buddhism* (Fujita, I. & Yamashita, R. 2013) and *“Blue Sky Meditation”* (Yamashita, R. 2014). One of the themes discussed in these books is the question of “who is it that is meditating?” If the “thinking mind” continues to meditate, transcending the thinking mind would be difficult. Likewise, we might ask: “who is it that is Focusing” or “who is it that is clearing a space”. The more the thinking-mind tries to find a space, the more difficult it becomes. It is like pressuring yourself to learn to relax. The more you practice, the more pressure you would put on yourself, instead of really relaxing! In this line of thinking, I have written about “Space Presencing” (Ikemi, 2015) and “Clearing a Space”.

It might be a bit of an exaggeration to say that meditation existed for me in the personal realm and Focusing in the professional realm. When the two are mixed, I was afraid that Experiencing may not function as well as it should. I still believe that Experiencing functions best in Listening. However, it was a client who broke away my distinction. Faced with the sufferings of clients, therapists cannot cling to a particular orientation or method. They will try to do all they can to help, and I am no exception. Faced with the client and her suffering described below, I related to her with Focusing, “Blue Sky Meditation” and “Compassion Meditation”, a combination that I had been trying out on myself in my own meditation. This session became the “initial case” of Blue Sky Focusing. Subsequently, after trying out what I

now call “Blue Sky Focusing”, a form of Space Presencing, with a number of clients, I refined the instructions for “Blue Sky Focusing” as you will see in another handout.

The major difference between meditation and Focusing as I see it, is as follows. Meditation is mostly done alone. Of course, there is guided meditation, but even in guided meditation in a group, the meditator practices alone. On the other hand, Focusing is “interaction first”, and Focusing happens in an interaction. Your presence brings forth my felt sense and the felt sense interacts with words and symbols. In contrast to meditation that is mostly done alone, there is real time interaction with another person in Focusing. Using this feature, Blue Sky Focusing is basically done in pairs. Blue Sky Focusing can be done with guided instructions to a group, but in that case, it tends to become more meditation than Focusing.

Another feature of my psychotherapy theory is the interplay of the pre-reflexive and reflexive modes of awareness (Ikemi, 2013, 2014). Images of clouds and of oneself appear in Blue Sky Focusing pre-reflexively. In other words, they come spontaneous and they are not fabricated beforehand. Taking time to reflect upon these experiences carries forward these experiences and creates new meaning. For this purpose, I am also attaching a “Reflections on My Blue Sky Focusing Experience Worksheet”.

In this presentation, I will present a vignette of the initial case, demonstrate Blue Sky Focusing, and hand out instructions for Blue Sky Focusing for participants to practice in pairs. The Focuser will take some time after the Blue Sky Focusing session to complete the worksheet.

Blue Sky Focusing: The Initial Case

The client said she wanted to take up “a really important thing” in that session, and that there were 2 issues that were related to that. I responded saying: “so there are 3 things here, the two related issues and the really important thing”. However, she felt nervous and apprehensive about touching upon the “really important thing”, and said it may be painful to do so. As I was suggesting to her: “we would like to find a way of being with that important thing in a way that is not painful” she had already started crying. While crying she said she was “unable to direct her attention to the bodily sense of it”, to which I replied: “don’t try to

direct your attention to the bodily sense of it. Let us, you and I, just stay here, just as it is, tears well up here, and you had the word 'exhausting' a little while ago." She then said: "I am now wanting to talk about this" and started to tell her story with lots of sobbing in between. More than 20 minutes had past at this point, indicating how sensitive this whole issue was.

The gist of her story was as follows. Being married for 9 years, she was not blessed with having a child and had been in infertility treatment. She finally got pregnant, but had a miscarriage exactly a year ago. She had suffered since, with feelings of remorse, self-criticism, and lots of other thoughts. She still finds it painful to think about pregnancy or even seeing a pregnant person.

As she spoke, she was able to felt sense the issue. "There is a lot of pressure here in the chest". Having finally arrived at a felt sense, I invited her to Clear a Space from all that, in a Space Presencing way, asking: "The pressure in your chest, the sense of having difficulty breathing, where does all that want to go?" After 20 seconds of silence, she replied: "the sky". I responded immediately: "The sky, let it go to the sky!" She cried even more, and a silence of a minute and a half followed.

"When I think of the sky, I remember the baby. Before the operation, a nurse said: the baby will be watching over (protecting) you from the sky". As I followed her experiencing while she said this (re-experiencing, *nacherleben*) something did not click for me. I said: "Something just popped up in me. When the nurse said, 'the baby will be watching over (protecting) you from the sky' (she starts crying), I felt no, my impression was that it was *you* who wanted to protect the baby (she nods.) Uhm... (breaks off in 20 second silence.) I then invited her saying: "This isn't Focusing, but might we try Blue Sky Meditation?" and she agreed.

I said, "you *are* the sky. The sky does not have boundaries. So it is you and your baby. Be the sky and watch your thoughts as they appear as clouds below." She said she could imagine a blue sky. Occasionally, she would burst out crying. In these moments I would say: "What just came to your mind is a cloud. And you are the sky".

After experiencing the sky for some time, she said: "my breathing is a lot easier". I responded: "alright then, can we do another meditation?" She consented and I went on: "from the sky, look way down to the ground. Visualize yourself on the ground. You will

see Aya (alias) there. Look at Aya from the sky. Both are you, the Aya on the ground and the sky. And this is a basic Buddhist meditation, pray to yourself, say: May I be well and happy, and may I be free from any kind of suffering". I repeated the words slowly and said that I am also praying that Aya is well and happy, and free from all suffering."

She did so in silence. In a little while, she smiled and said: "the Aya down there is quite well." I responded saying: "be aware (mindful) that Aya is well." She then said, "By well, I mean, she's like a child jumping around". She laughed out. This was the first time she laughed in this session.

She then said: "I feel protected and warm (10-second pause) a relief (30-second pause) I'm feeling calm". At this time, it seemed to me that her skin looked prettier and healthier than before the session, and I told her so. She laughed out loud and she told me that I looked like Buddha, and we both laughed then re-contacted the calmness she felt and ended the 55-minute session.