

On Tears and Focusing

by Kathleen N. McGulre

A tremendous thank you to those who took time and vulnerability to respond to my research questions on tears and focusing (*TFC*, March 1990). I received nine responses, not enough for large-scale quantitative research, but a wonderful start for qualitative/phenomenological research. More importantly, reading the words of others gave me enough validation for the central importance of tears to myself that I probably no longer need to do *research* to prove that tears are important.

One very interesting piece of information: The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator draws on the theory of Jung and types people as Introverted (I) or Extroverted (E), Intuitive (N) or Sensation (S), Feeling (F) or Thinking (T), and Judging (J) (orderly) or Perceiving (P) (spontaneous). Kiersey and Bates (*Please Understand Me*, Prometheus Nemesis Books, 1978) give the following statistics for Americans: 75% E, 25% I; 12% NF, 12% NT, 38% SJ, 38% SP. Here are the types for those responding to my questions: E/INTJ, INFJ, INFJ, INT/FJ, INFP/J, INFJ, ENFJ, INFJ. You can see that 7 1/2 out of 9 are Introverts, 100% are Intuitives (comfortable with vague, global information vs. concrete sensory data), 7 1/2 out of 9 make judgments according to feeling values rather than logical thinking, 7/12 prefer life to be ordered vs. spontaneous (that's probably how they managed to get the response in the mail!). In the general population, there are 1% INTJ, 1% INFJ, 1% INFP, 5% ENFJ. These four types make up 100% of my responders! I'd have to write a whole paper on what this suggests to me, but, if there's anyone out there looking for a dissertation topic, they could look at Myers-Briggs Type in relation to focusing.

Basically, NF people see life as a quest for personal meaning and are responsible for a large part of art, literature, and humanistic psychology. It's the SJ's who keep society's institutions going, the SP's who are the thrill and fun seekers and entertainers, the NT's who

construct theoretical schemas.

Most of my hypotheses can't be tested without a much larger pool of responses. I thought that Fs would place more value on tears than Ts. I don't have enough responses to say, although I heard mainly from Fs, and even most of my Ts valued tears 9 or 10 out of 10.

I think the argument between cathartic vs. non-cathartic focusers may reflect a difference on the T vs. F continuum. T people have their footing in the world of logic and make decisions based upon rules of logic. They may be more likely to experience tears as getting in the way of their thinking, as disorienting and side-tracking. F people have their ground in the world of value judgments and make decisions in terms of personal value. As an F person, I am aware that I use my tears as a guide to making decisions. Tears = this is important to me. It has value for me. If I am not allowed to go with my tears, I feel disoriented and unable to know who I really am.

60% of men are T, 60% of women are F. I thought maybe the T/F dimension would clarify some of what gets thought of as a gender difference, e.g., a T woman might be more similar to most men on this dimension, an F man might be more similar to most women. But I have too few T descriptions to go on—and some lovely descriptions of tears from Ts. There is just a hint that the Ts may find tears a little more interfering, but I'd have to hear from many more people.

Here's what respondents said about their tears: "Crying now is almost entirely connected with my emotions around heartfelt feelings between people... [Tears] are a sign to me that something is going on inside, and it is always a sign of a good process... The 'Aha!' is often accompanied by tears, but I take that only as a sign that something good happened—that I am caring for myself" (E/INTJ male).

"As I try to be specific about what makes me cry, the following usually bring tears to my eyes: 1) when I'm touched by another's kindness or by the pain and suffering that affects others, 2)



when I'm hurt and sometimes when I'm angry, 3) when I feel deep gratitude, 4) when I'm touched by the feelings of oneness with nature, music, art, 5) when I say goodbye to someone I feel especially close to... at a time when I know I won't be seeing that person for a long while, and finally I find tears in my eyes during focusing when I can be especially soft with a hard place in myself, when I feel from myself the attitude that says, 'yes, you're important to me, I know you hurt and I'm listening'... Tears feel like a gift to me because they allow me to stay inside rather than to go up into my head and start thinking. They alert me to the something more that is still to unfold if I stay in touch with how my body feels at the time" (INFJ female).

"Tears are truth, as emotions are truth. Tears and truthsaying come together for me. Tears no longer seem to be painful, and are often these days accompanied by laughter, or a smile, by a tenderness new and delightful to me, by a softness that seems to be a door to hidden knowledge. Tears are a release, a cleansing. I can cry whenever I want to, I don't need permission any more... [Tears] signal to me that I am hitting paydirt, and, when guiding others, tears are often the easiest indicator of a felt shift for me" (INT/FJ male).

"Tears are the best guide that I have for knowing what is right for me, what I value. I am afraid that, if I am not allowed to cry, I will lose my bearings, my capacity to know wrong from right. I would not know how to decide things... I cry when people are nice to each other, when there are warm moments, especially when I see a father being loving toward a child. I cry when I see excellence in performance, especially if the performer is a woman. I cry when I hear excellent, transcending music, when I am uplifted in a spiritual sense. I cry a lot in movies—when there is a death, an expression of sadness, or, again, when people are very loving to each other... I cry when I feel disappointed in or betrayed by others—when

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Focusing and Meditation: One Comparison

by Neil Friedman

As meditation becomes more and more popular, it happens increasingly often that I am asked, in focusing workshops, "How does focusing compare with meditation?" At times the comparison implied in the question seems naive (as in "Oh, focusing, yeah—it's a lot like meditation, isn't it?"). Sometimes it is based simply on the notion that both happen with eyes closed. But at other times, the implied comparison speaks to the experience of both focusing and meditation. I find it best to answer that question by describing what happens when I meditate and when I focus.

But there are times when experienced students of meditation seem to be asking for what might be called a formal comparison between meditation and focusing. Gradually I have evolved this answer to their question:

Comparing focusing with meditation can be useful but it can also be confusing. It helps to speak of different kinds of meditation. Lawrence LeShan (in *How to Meditate*) is one of those who contrasts *mindfulness* approaches and *concentration* approaches.

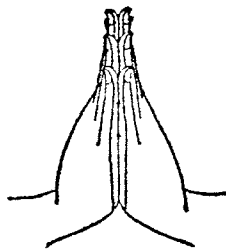
In mindfulness meditation one closes one's eyes and then simply watches—thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, whatever—as they pass the screen of awareness. One disidentifies with the content of these inner percepts. Compare a subway station platform. Trains pull in and trains pull out. In mindfulness meditation, thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc. are these trains and when one finds that one has gotten on, one gets off and returns to the platform. One watches. There is no selectivity and no owning.

In concentration meditation one fixes one's attention on some specific object—a mantra, the breath, a spot in the room, a mandala. The aim is to blot out all save the object of concentration.

Now, focusing combines aspects of the two approaches but is not exactly the same as either.

Focusing *concentrates* one's attention

on one's flow of experiencing. So it is not just a matter of being mindful of whatever passes the screen. There is a selectivity. And there is a going-into, a working-with what is in the flow. One gets on the train. So one feels and allows oneself to feel; e.g., one's whole sense of sitting just now at Coki Beach: a serene sense of emptiness in the chest area and some flickering of lights behind the eyes. One identifies this in-flux state as one's own for now: I'm mellow and energized.



But the *contents* of this object of concentration are in flux rather than static (like, e.g. a mantra), and it is much of the mindfulness attitude which most helps in going with the flow. That is, a non-judgmental, letting arise and fall relation to the experiential flow. The subway station platform now has become our experiential flow and we return to it over and over again after delving into its contents as needed.

Hence, one can say that focusing is not just like either mindfulness or concentration schools of meditation. But it tends to use a *mindfulness*-like attitude in *concentrating* attention on the flow of experiencing.

I have found that this comparison helps students of meditation better understand focusing. It helps them know where to put their attention and what to do with it and what to allow it to do. Less explicit comparisons tend to be more confusing than helpful, especially when the kind of meditation being spoken about is not made clear. One must know what question one is answering before launching into a comparison of meditation and focusing. ☞

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On Tears and Focusing

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my heart is broken. This is perhaps the deepest crying... When I start crying or notice tears, I look for words or images in a focusing way... If deciding between two things, the one that moves me to tears gets my vote... In focusing, I look for the feeling of tears coming as a guide to the felt sense. A felt shift for me usually includes tears coming... As a therapist, I guide my clients toward their tears, feeling that the deepest 'stuck' meanings will come from there" (INFJ female).

"Tears are...a way of recognizing what is important, meaningful to me... Many things make me cry: being treated very gently or treating myself very gently, hearing others' pain or speaking of my own, being angry and frustrated with someone I love, trying to tell someone I am moved or touched by their efforts or what I see in them or what I wish for them, deaths in movies but less so in real life, hearing a brass band playing circus music nearby, seeing the young perform beautifully and creatively, having things be as they're 'supposed to be', weddings, being afraid, feeling despair and hopelessness, feeling renewed hope with its renewed vulnerability, feeling exhausted and overloaded... Yes, my tears influence my decisions. They clue me in to how important something is to me—the personal meaningfulness and importance of the situation can no longer be denied and must be honored... I cannot remember ever crying while focusing by myself... Focusing is a very peaceful process for me. Clearing a space gives me a sense of being bigger than and other than my problems. This distancing of myself from my problems gives me room to work calmly and peacefully with them without getting caught up in them... Even though I don't cry when focusing alone, I do cry when my therapist guides me in focusing. He does not have me clear a space but rather asks first what I want most to work on and we go on from there" (INFP/J female).

"I am happy when I cry in a focusing session, I know I've moved forward. (Not so with my pre-focusing crying.) Recently, though, I know I've hit paydirt if I just sit silently with a new

feeling (or an old feeling newly felt). My husband hardly ever cries...but he too will fall silent... I still rate tears 9 on your scale. But the newness of an old feeling is more important still...I don't believe I will make a decision before or during tears. After the dissolution, my mind can come clearly into play... Tears without focusing are still a release, but the step *forward* is not there, and the *healing* feeling is not as much present. However, you can certainly have the focusing step, and healing feeling, without tears!" (INFP female).

"What make me cry? Thinking about sad things. The feeling in my body is of exhaustion...Tears don't have much to do with decisions. Information—an awareness of my own mortality. Focusing brings the tears, when I'm listening to my wife cry. Four times a year, I might cry while focusing, mostly because I feel sorry for myself" (INFJ male).

"Focusing has taught me how not to get stuck in my crying... Even though I was in the habit of giving myself permission to cry, there was something about 'welcoming the tears' in a focusing way that allowed me to let them go rather quickly... At times my tears influence my decisions... When I cry I find myself thinking something like this: 'So this issue means a lot more to me than I suspected.' And I might change my mind about my original decision. Or sometimes my tears let me know that I'm more vulnerable than I knew and *that* might make me rethink my decision

and possibly change it" (ENFJ female).

"I hold tears, like most things, as neutral, my interpretation and judgments about them are state-situation specific... I mostly interpret them as an alerting device. Their presence lets me know there is something deeper present within me that I need to shift into focusing to become aware of... Through experiencing I have learned to use [tears] to unlock the richer experience waiting inside. Tears are a trigger, but not the only one. There are a multitude of ways the body signals its need for congruence. Anger lets me know there is more present than what I'm allowing too... Do tears influence [my] decisions? In a way, since they trigger focusing postures. Tears for me are the signal of the more that is present. It is focusing that influences the decisions... Tears invite me in, focusing allows the unfolding to make known the 'more than' which is present..." (INTJ female).

These excerpts relate to the questions: "Do tears give information? Do they influence decisions? How do they relate to focusing?" I have many more wonderful sharings about how tears come in the body, what makes people cry, how often people cry, etc. (Thank you, respondents, for your intimate gifts—I had many tears in my eyes in the reading.)

So, this is a flavor of what I've received, selected through my bias. I want, I think, to lead people to pay attention to their tears and to see them as

Dear Focusing Connection,

I've studied the Enneagram personality theory in the past year, and it has enriched my skills in the guiding arena.

Example: Type 7's big thing is to avoid pain. When I know someone is a 7 I am able easily to pick up when the person wants to gloss over or run away from the painful places. I can then encourage the focuser to perhaps stay with them.

On the other hand, knowing someone is a Type 4, I will be on guard about that person falling into the pain and wallowing in it, that being in a sense that person's natural "delight."

If anyone has done work relating the Enneagram to focusing I would be interested in hearing from them.

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a differentiated landscape of meanings, not simply a response to pain. I also think that being moved to tears plays an important role in the making of value judgments through feeling, and I want to show that tears are a rational (information-giving, decision-making) process, not a totally irrational one.☞

Kathleen N. McGuire would like very much to hear from more people in response to the questions mentioned in this article. She may be reached at 3440 Onyx Street, Eugene, OR 97405.

Focusing in Community

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format over a period of months while skills are put in place and the group bonds securely.

Focus in the context of listening. People exploring their interiors after adequate focusing training will focus naturally as listening occurs. The listener will note the inward look of the speaker's eyes and slow down in rate of speech. The formalized step-by-step focusing approach is helpful in learning to identify the feeling tones in the focusing process, but once this is learned many instructions are superfluous. They may even get in the way. Guide only when the speaker shows symptoms of getting lost in the process. Feedback from the

speaker and others in the group is critical in building the ability to do this.

Apportion listening/focusing time equally. Persons who distance themselves from their feelings or who tend to be caretakers of others but not of themselves, will often offer to give up time to someone in obvious distress. This is a sacrifice neither party can afford. One needs the practice of getting in touch; the other needs to recognize that the group is therapeutic, not therapy. Devastating crises may dictate exceptions, but as a rule of thumb, stick with equal shares.

Work as a group unit on a regular basis. It is certainly useful and desirable to vary your format by dividing in pairs or triads sometimes. These have the ad-

vantage of offering longer focusing opportunities, but come back to round robin processing as your regular mode. It fosters mutual respect, promotes group health, and is superb way to improve skill. Besides, six people can give each other twenty minutes of time each over a two-hour period, and you can get a lot done in twenty minutes. For that matter, you can accomplish a great deal in ten. Pre-agreed time limitations encourage "getting down to it." A two-minute warning before time is up is helpful, as well.☞

This article will be continued next issue with "Things to Watch For" and "Working Out Issues Among Group Members." Jane Lowell may be reached at 4211 Irish Hills Dr #3D, South Bend, IN 46614-3090.