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BEING TOUCHED AND BEING MOVED: THE SPIRITUAL VALUE OF TEARS

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The following excerpts from my manuscript, Follow your Tears, Finding Life's Meaning Through Focusing, show how our tears, even the faintest sheen in our eyes, are one major way in which our body lets us know what matters, the core spiritual values which give meaning to our lives. Focusing upon the meaning indicated by tears of being touched and moved allow us to make words for our unique, and also universal, pathways to meaning. These excerpts are also my "thank you" to the many Focusers who responded to my Tears Questionnaires.

From Chapter 5: "If you Cry Too Little"

GETTING STARTED

A Sheen of Tears

My child's preschool teacher was a wonderful, gentle, caring man. I thought he would have a lot to say about tears and crying, so I asked him to fill out my questionnaire. He said, "I won't have much to say. I'm young. I haven't had a lot of deaths or tragedies. A few broken hearts--that's all." I said, "Oh, I don't mean only sobbing. I mean when you just get tears in your eyes--when you're moved by something." He got tears in his eyes right then and answered, "Oh! That! That happens all the time." Another man discounting his tears: "Please send your questionnaire on crying. I can't -- except in the dark, alone, at movies or TV."

The slightest sheen of tears in your eyes is enough to let you know that you have been moved or touched by something. Paying attention to what brings tears puts you in touch with valuable information about what matters to you. You may never choose to go the additional steps of sobbing about childhood pain and loss. Right now we are concentrating just on the sheen of tears.

Although many people consider it a pleasure to be able to cry with another person, crying alone or in movies is equally valuable. Some people unabashedly seek out a "tear-jerker" movie to touch them. They want to find the aliveness that comes from contacting their tears.

Being Moved and Being Touched

Feeling touched is one of the most heart-warming experiences a person can have. Unfortunately, we have been so trained to associate tears with pain that we don't notice that feeling touched feels good: warm, connected, loving.

Most of the time, our tears express feeling touched, feeling moved, feeling joyful, feeling love, feeling compassion. Even tears of grief and pain contain loving feelings of self-compassion, if we push away the Inner Critic who punishes us for crying. Tears feel good.

Here's a partial list of the feelings that can be signaled by tears: grief, tenderness, compassion, love, anger, hurt, rage, joy, awe, reverence, laughter, pride. Even tears of grief have a large component of positive feeling. When a grieving widow describes her loved one, she pours out tears of love and gratitude along with tears of longing. She smiles through her tears as she celebrates her memories and their love. Listen to the words:

I don't know if I can live without him (tears of grief)...I remember when we first met. We had so much fun (smiling tears). We were so carefree. We used to go out dancing, you know, to the big bands. Oh, what a time! (tears of joy) ...It's hard that he's gone (tears of grief)...but I'm so happy for the time that we had (tears of joy).

If you notice your tears, without judging them as painful and shutting them off, you will feel alive.

William Gaylin, in his wonderful book, *Feelings: Our Vital Signs* (1979), describes "feeling touched" and "feeling moved":

Touched is generally a light emotion, although we do experience feelings of being deeply touched. The fact that we speak of it so...merely affirms the sense of touch as being gentle feeling. The caress is its symbol. It arises almost inevitably in terms of something that is done for us by someone. It is a person-to-person emotion.

Being moved, on the other hand, is a deep and intense emotion, and it rarely relates to a transaction between people. More often than not, the feeling of being moved is in relationship to certain abstractions, events, concepts, and sensations. p. 195

While Gaylin makes no mention of tears in the text, his quotations from literature illustrating feeling touched and feeling moved almost all include a reference to tears as a signpost of these emotions:

"...his voice faltered...he burst into tears." From H. Stendhal, *The Red and The Black*, P. 203.

"The two women looked at each other and their eyes filled with tears." From Flaubert, "A Simple Heart" in *Three Tales*, p. 42.

"His heart broke and he wanted to put his head on her belly where the wet spot was, and cry." From Baldwin, *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, p. 3.

"The tears flowed so plentifully that Maggie saw nothing around her for the next ten minutes." From Eliot, *The Mill On The Floss*, p. 42.

"His eyes were brimming over." From Kazantzakis, *Zorba The Greek*, p. 228.

We will start by thinking about times when we have been touched by something someone has done for us and when we have been moved by contact with something greater than ourselves.

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE CRY

Here are some examples of what makes some people cry. As you read, pay attention to the inside of your body. Notice any tears or any physical sensations signaling tears. Notice if you are touched or moved:

“The Olympics are always filled with tears for me. I tear up when we sing the Star-Spangled Banner. Every time someone stands up to receive a gold medal, with the country’s anthem playing, the medal winner, male or female, tears up and I tear up, too. One year a skater fell and cried with frustration, and I cried with him. I hear how someone overcame a childhood disease or is skating for his sick mother, and I cry. I get tears in my eyes when I see a figure skater or a gymnast execute a perfect routine. One year the TV showed one of the first Olympic runners, now very old, carrying in the torch, this time under the banner of freedom for his country for the first time. I was so moved I cried and cried.

I watched my husband cry when his basketball team lost the series. ‘Why?’ I asked. ‘They are my brothers.’ I saw General Schwarzkopf with tears for the fighters in Desert Storm, and I cried when I saw women soldiers with tears in their eyes.”

“What makes me cry?--Listening to someone else sharing something really deep and important to them that is opening for them, the truth that has been blocked or blocking them, their hurt child sharing. This is so true with my Focusing partner and with other people that I Focus with. --When I am Focusing from that deep place and the tears come. -- Schmalzzy movies, almost any era. Bambi, The Waltons, sometimes even Lassie! Anything where families are loving with each other, where children or animals are in danger or hurt and then rescued. -- When families are reunited on TV. Gets me every time, that one (I am adopted). -- When I am utterly frustrated and do not have the energy to deal with the situation. -- When someone is cruel to either me or my daughter, and I am so angry that I don’t know how to cope. -- When I feel so full of joy that it spills over in tears.”

“My daughter’s miscarriage, along with her beautiful struggle or interaction with a chronic disease. Sometimes after I’m with her and aware of her limping and deformity. Also the death of my best friend’s father and our conversations of sharing her feelings. Also a TV special on abused children. Also seeing an old lover walk into an AA meeting and share his need to be there -- just last night.”

“I was standing in line at the swimming pool the other night. There were three retarded men standing off to the side. The more I looked at these men and the more I thought about them, it made me cry. I had tears rolling out of my eyes. I wiped them quickly so no one would know that I was crying.

I remember when I was young and would cry when I would see old men, old men who were looking like they were in pain or just sad looking -- like they had a hard life. I remember going to a nursing home with a church group. That just tore me up.”

HOW CRYING FEELS

Physical Sensations

Subtle bodily sensations can indicate the beginning of tears. Many times as a therapist I have said to a client, "I see some tears in yours eyes," and they have said, "No, I'm not aware of any," or "No, that was just from yawning." Yet I swear I saw a sheen of tears.

I also notice even more subtle signs as a prelude to tears. I may see a flush of red on the throat. I may see a faint quivering of muscles around the eyes, in the cheeks or chin. Or a hand goes over the heart. Some people rub their eyes, just like a child would, as if flicking tears away. If I mention these things, sometimes the person can become aware of the tearfulness and let it rise to the eyes. If I do not mention the signs of vulnerability that I see, the opportunity to find tears, and therefore important meanings, may be lost.

If you want to encourage your own tears, be open to these signs. You will have to feel them from the inside: the blush warming your throat, the quivering around eyes or mouth, the twitching cheek muscle, the lump in your throat, the heat of tears in your eyes or the childlike attempt to wipe them away, the sensation of melting in your chest and heart that comes with tears of love and self-love.

Welcoming the Tears

Here is how I talk to someone who is on the verge of tears:

"I notice some tears in your eyes...Can you pay attention to what's happening in your chest and throat area?...It's okay to close your eyes...Just let yourself notice if there's a lump in there, or a warming feeling..." The person: "There's a lump in my throat. I can't go further." Me: "Just imagine that you are putting your hands around that lump, that you are warming it with your hands...You can actually put your hands there if it helps ...It's as if there is a little child in there, who's crying, or a wounded animal...Can you just be gentle with What's there? ... Be loving to that feeling... Can you put your arms around it?... You might feel it melting, and the tears can come forth." And the tears will flow.

Chapter Six gives lots of examples of how to put your arms around your own Inner Self, so that you can comfort yourself while you cry. For now, I want to give you the idea that you already may be crying, inside, before the tears come to your eyes. You may have to notice the lump in your throat, the heaviness or fullness around the heart, and welcome these early beginnings before the tears can rise to our eyes.

Others' Descriptions

Here's how people describe the coming of tears:

"Crying feels good to me, much better than the build-up before. I feel an ache in my heart, a lump in my throat, tension around my eyes and cheeks, a change (quickening) of my breathing. When I begin to cry, I often hope for it to last a bit, like an afternoon shower that cleanses the air."

“When there is just a sheen of tears, I am mostly aware of warm feelings, gentle ones in my chest area and a hotness around my eyes. Sometimes I feel other stronger feelings under those but I am in a situation where I do not feel comfortable crying. Yes, there seems to be two kinds of sheen. One is gentle feelings of warmth and love, openness and joy, the other is suppressed deeper crying.”

“The sheen in my eyes is painless. The next stage might be a lump or tightening or ache in my throat -- or sometimes in my heart. If I let the lump melt or loosen, tears come from my eyes and I feel better. My cheeks and sometimes my lip quiver.”

“A sheen of tears in my eyes feels warm, grounded, real, powerful. It makes me pause and reflect inward: ‘What’s this all about?’...Sometimes I become aware of a sadness through my chest, a lump in my throat. Then I have to pay attention inside. I have to capture the ‘wisp’ of sadness in words or images to let the tears come.

Sometimes I just feel bad, groggy, out of sorts all day for ‘no reason.’ Then I have to stop and use Focusing to find words for the tears so I can cry and feel better. This happened especially in the year and a half after my sister died of suicide (that was fifteen years ago, and I feel the beginning of tears in my chest as I write of it).

Sometimes I get a pain in my jaw and a sense of being cut off, isolated from other people. Then I use Focusing to find the tears and the words are usually ‘I’m lonely.’ Labeling the pain lets it dissolve into tears, and I feel better and no longer cut off.”

HELPING YOURSELF TO CRY

Seeking Opportunities For Tears

Here’s a revolutionary idea: you can learn to notice you need to cry and seek out situations which bring tears. Remember, tears are your body’s link with aliveness. If you feel numb or out of touch with life, you do not have to wait passively for an external event to arouse tears. You can make an active decision to help yourself cry. The tears you find in this way are just as real, just as meaningful, and just as refreshing and life-giving as any other tear. A male friend asked to be listened to almost daily while he Focused. He was so relieved when he could find a sheen of tears: “I feel alive again. I’m not numb anymore.”

Many women know about actively seeking tears. If a woman thinks she needs a good cry, she will take herself off to a romantic movie or put on powerful music. Men deserve to be let in on this healthy, life-giving secret.

I seek the opportunity to cry when I have a stuffed up, blurry, depressed, or sad feeling inside. In college I would put on a Johnny Mathis album and bawl. Now that I have learned Focusing, I am more likely to sit down, pay attention to the center of my body, and ask myself, “What’s going on?”

I also sometimes choose to go to a movie which I know will be touching or moving, even when I’m not feeling sad. I like the alive, flowing energy that crying brings.

Sometimes I choose to play transcending music when I want to be uplifted and moved to tears. I also go to church on Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Christmas Eve, knowing I will be moved to tears. It feels good.

Keeping a diary of Your Tears

Some universal, archetypal events bring tears, like marriages, births, deaths, transcendence over hardship. But each individual also creates a unique world of meanings out of past experiences and future hopes.

You can discover what matters to you by keeping a diary of your tears for a few weeks. You will want to note the following:

- The incident: What happened?
- The physical sensations: what did you notice in your body?
- The emotion: sad, happy, joyful, awed, tender, etc.
- The meaning: Why did it make you cry?

Here's my tears' diary for the week of January 23-31, 1992. It was an unusual week. I was home most of the time with my son who had the chicken pox. Still, I found lots of occasions for tears:

“Thursday, Jan. 23: Toward the end of a Focusing turn with a friend, I told a dream where we (the family) thought my father was lost, but he ended up driving us to the zoo. Just a mist in the eyes, fullness around my heart. The words: “I bet my father doesn't get to have much fun.” Emotion of sadness, caring about him. The meaning: understanding him better and my own inner criticism of me for having fun.

Saturday, Jan. 25: Saw the movie ‘Prince of Tides’ -- a graduate-level exercise in having tears. I grieved deeply with the hero about his childhood, almost sobbing, tears flowing. I was touched as he cried in his therapist's arms, and she cried with him. Meaning: “Yes, I have sadness in my childhood, too, and why are people mean to each other?” but also uplifted: “I'm a therapist and I help people to heal in that way.”

Sunday, Jan. 26: A Focusing turn became deep grieving, sobbing, a huge pile of Kleenex, about being left by people I love: “Why can't they just decide to love me?” I have felt better ever since. Some heaviness and bitterness has lifted, and I feel more accepting of other people, less ‘rejected.’

My Focusing partner, during her turn, had a tearful feeling inside and said, “If I were the kind of person who cries, I would cry now” as she remembered being shamed for girlhood feelings of pride about her budding womanhood. She recovered her liking for that young Self and her knowledge that it isn't right for people to make fun of her, then or now.

Monday, Jan. 27: My four-year-old son, frustrated and angry from being sick and some other disappointment, has destroyed something that he knows I care about. I feel shocked, overwhelmed, have tears of betrayal, hopelessness (just a sheen in the eyes) and

express my sadness to him. Then I realize that the real issue is his frustration about being sick, and I try to comfort him.

Also Monday: my son gets tears in his eyes several times watching the movie "The Bears:" the mother bear gets crushed by a stone and baby tries to dig her out, a hunter wounds the father bear, the baby bear and initially grumpy father bear curl up to sleep, comforting each other.

Tuesday, Jan. 28: Focusing turn: I cried about being a fighter as a little girl, always fighting if I had half a chance, how it wasn't fair if I didn't have a chance. It felt good to recover this fighter part of me. I liked her, felt touched by her courage and strength.

My Focusing partner, during her turn, cried deeply about her mother not protecting her from her father's anger. I cried with her when she described how, as an adult, she had stopped a woman from being raped by jumping in and saying "No!": I was touched by her care for this other woman and saddened that no one had protected her when she needed it. She was glad to be doing her grieving, her healing.

Wednesday, Jan. 29: I received a Tears' Questionnaire response from someone very important to me, someone who hadn't shared many of his tears with me. He wrote that he was crying then, as he wrote, and I had tears in my eyes. I was touched by his vulnerability and by his taking my work seriously. It felt good and warm and intimate.

Thursday, Jan. 30: I cried as a client described the death of her newborn baby and her inability to grieve. Tears rolling quietly down my face, feeling of heartbreaking pain in my chest. I was sad about the event and sad for her need to block out the too great pain. My tears allowed her a sheen of tears, then she distracted herself. She almost cried again when I described holding the baby here, in her imagination, and saying "Good bye" as she hadn't been able to do in the hospital, but again, she needed to walk away from the pain. Not safe enough yet, body not ready to bear it and protects itself appropriately with numbness.

In the mail I received a poem about tears, taken from a medical journal. I felt touched (a faint tearful feeling in my chest) that a busy doctor took time to send this to me and moved that my work brings me this intimate connection with strangers.

Later, at a concert of German *lieder*, my German friend had tears steaming down her face as she heard familiar songs from childhood. She felt touched, comforted by these lullabies sung in her mother tongue, but she also grieved for the brother who used to sing so beautifully.

I heard that someone else broke into tears during these lullabies, remembering his now-dead wife singing to the children. The stranger in the seat next to him, also a man, took his hand. At the end of the program, the stranger and his wife hugged the man, saying 'We're glad we could be here for you.' I was moved to tears by this story of human kindness.

Priming the Pump

Generally, when people want to be touched or moved, they turn to literature, film, nature, church, or little children. Below is a list of movies, books, and music which have brought tears for others and their reasons why. Just to be sure you have something to write in your diary, I recommend that you try some of these guaranteed “tear-jerkers.” I hope they will help you taste a variety of feelings. [I am deleting the lists in the interest of space.]

From Chapter 6: “Focusing: Finding Meaning”

WHAT’S THE MEANING?

By now you have experienced the sheen of tears. Perhaps you have come to treasure moments of being touched and moved. They are an instant channel to energy, a tap root, to the core of your Being and the Universe.

You may find yourself asking some questions:

- What does it mean to “be moved by” something? Am I supposed to do something?
- Do my tears mean anything? Are they trying to tell me something?
- Why do I always cry when I see a particular thing?
- Are my tears related to something from my childhood?
- Do the same things touch other people as touch me?

What Is ‘Meaning’?

You experience the meaning of living by having feelings in your body, not from ideas in your head. “Meaning” lies in your unique feeling response to any situation, based on your own lifetime of experiences. One man might experience a terrible grief when his father is dying: “Oh, I can’t go on living. He *means* so much to me. Everything that is important to me is wrapped up in him.” Another man may have a different experience at his father’s death, a sadness tinged with joy: “I’ll miss him, but it *means* that he is free. His time has come.” By carefully making words for feelings, you can find your own unique meanings.

Being open to tears, anger, embarrassment, love, and other emotions allows you to discover, through the exploration of the feeling, the personal meanings which give value and direction to your life. It might help to think of feelings as “felt meaning”—your feeling of the meaning of the situation to you. They are your access to the network of thoughts and beliefs which gives a goal and a direction, a meaning or a purpose, to your life.

For instance, when I saw a slender Asian woman stand up as the violin soloist at a concert and launch into sound, I welled up with tears. The tears indicated that the situation had meaning for me. I found the precise meaning as I made words for the texture

of the feeling: "It's not just that she is a woman, but that she is small and feminine. I can be feminine and be powerful. A small, feminine person can be the vehicle for excellence. I have never seen this before. Always before the vehicle has been a man. Women can do this. I can do this."

If I had not allowed myself to experience the feeling, to taste the tears and look for words to describe them, I would have been cut off from the profound meanings in the situation, meanings that could affect the entire course of my life.

The capacity to feel the meaning of situations, to be moved to tears, is a skill and a gift overlooked in our society. Psychologists and philosophers note the feelings of isolation, alienation, and despair called the "existential neurosis:" "What's the meaning of my life?" The loss of meaning can be traced to the downplaying of the ability to feel and thus to discover the personal values which can guide meaningful action.

In 1993, a newly elected President (Bill Clinton) allowed tears to stream down his cheeks as he listened to a hymn in church. He was not ashamed. A journalist said, "He doesn't just put in an appearance at church. He believes in it." The same month I read in Newsweek that the devastation wrought by AIDS in the artistic community had brought feeling back into art. The United States sent marines to Somalia to feed the hungry, on a mission of compassion, in part because the public was moved too deeply by the starving visions on televisions to stand by without helping. Perhaps we are ready to be able to feel deeply, for ourselves, our neighbors, and our planet, and to let our actions be guided by the profound moral values found in our tears.

Focusing Upon The Meaning

Focusing, a self-help skill developed by Eugene Gendlin (1981), is a meditation-like process for discovering meaning. Focusing can be used for many purposes: creative writing, artistic expression, problem solving, personal growth. You will learn to use it to explore the meanings in your tears.

In Focusing, you set aside everything that you already know about something and pay attention to the "felt meaning" or the "felt sense," the subtle nuances that you can feel but for which you don't yet have words or images. In the concert hall, I used Focusing to discover the meaning in my tears. I asked myself, "Why am I crying?" and looked for just the right words to describe the texture of the feeling. Then I knew that I, too, wanted to strive for excellence.

Focusing is a natural process for finding meaning which happens all day long without our conscious attention. Here's a two-minute example of natural Focusing from a phone call with a friend. He had written that he was always moved to tears by a song where a little boy died in the night, watched over by his toy soldier and stuffed dog:

Him: "I don't understand why that song always makes me cry."

Me: "Well, the little boy died. Anyone would feel sad about that."

- Him: (with some irritation) "No, it's not because he died. It's about the soldier and the dog waiting for him."
- Me: "Oh, now I see. It's something about the loyalty that moves you."
- Him: (with evident relief) "Yes, that's it. That's exactly right. Something about loyalty."

Without ever learning the technique, he Focused naturally, checking my words against his body sense of the meaning and saying no until the words were just right to capture the meaning.

Here's another example. I asked a woman whether tears influenced her decisions. She answered:

"Just today I had tears when I went on a hike in the woods. They allowed me to realize that our move to the city had made me lose touch with something important to me. I decided to make sure that I visit Nature often and even to consider moving back to the country.

She could continue finding meaning by asking herself, "What is it about Nature that is important to me, that makes me cry?" and find more words.

From Tears to Meaning

Sometimes you will find tears in your eyes without knowing why. By Focusing, you can discover the reason. You ask yourself a Focusing question, like "What about this moves me?" and wait quietly, attending to the *felt* meaning in the center of your torso, in the area of your heart/chest/diaphragm.

When words or images arise, you check them carefully against the *felt* meaning:

"Is it this? No, not quite...Maybe it's...No, not that..."

Ah, I think it's...Yes, that's it. That's exactly right."

The lump in your throat or thickening in your chest, wordless though it is, knows the answer and will stubbornly refuse to respond until you hit upon the right words or image. When you find the right words, the lump will melt, the warmth will spread through your chest, and you will know exactly why you are crying. Such a release is called a "felt shift." You will have found your unique answer to the question, "Why does this move me?," crafted out of your own life experiences as carried in your body. The meaning will imply actions.

Some experienced Focusers describe how tears alert them to important meanings:

"A tightening in my throat and mist in my eyes often comes as a surprise-I didn't know I felt that strong about that. Tears are not subtle--I can really use them to feel the 'more.'"

"When I'm tired and overly busy, I'm likely to explode into tears of anger and frustration. If I'm able to get by myself, I can often track to the level of experiencing

beneath the tears and use the situation to discover something new. Increasingly, tears are for me an indication that I'm not paying attention to something."

"Tears offer a clue that I need to Focus and be with my feelings to see if I can accept and allow some movement to a new place. Many good decisions and insights have come from this, like I can achieve my retirement goals and move realistically through closing the company."

"Tears are an important expression of my real self that has not been listened to and wants to be heard."

From Meaninglessness to Tears

Focusing and tears can also work in another direction. You might choose to Focus because you feel numb or life feels meaningless. Through Focusing, you can hit upon energy and meaning again. A male friend of mine asked to do Focusing with me for a few minutes every day. He worked in an intense hospital situation and would become emotionally overloaded and numbed out. After a few moments of paying attention and making words for the "numbness," he would hit upon something meaningful from the day, his eyes would well with tears, and he would say, "Now I feel alive again."

A felt meaning is anything that you experience as a feeling, without words. For instance, you might have a "bad feeling" about a conversation with a friend. You can Focus upon the "bad feeling," the felt meaning, again asking open-ended questions and waiting for your body to respond:

"What is it about that conversation that left me feeling so bad?...Is it that I'm mad?...No...Am I feeling left out?...No...Ah, I think it's that he didn't ask me first.. Ah, yes."

The body responds, the bad feeling melts, and you understand exactly what happened. Now, you can decide what to do about it.

Often when you hit upon exactly the right words or images, you will experience a sheen of tears. Your tears of being touched or moved are one more way that your body lets you know that you have hit upon just the right piece of information. You will have found out *what matters* to you, and, thus, what you want to do.

Here are some more examples from my own experience:

For several months, I Focused upon whether I wanted to continue infertility treatment to have a baby or whether I could pursue creativity through a new career direction instead. I really *wanted* the answer to be the new career. That was a much easier solution.

However, every time I Focused, I found tears around the meanings involved in having a child. Talk of the new career option left me dry. I decided that the meaningful direction for me lay in having a child, and I eventually adopted a baby. I have not regretted that decision.

A friend Focused on a dream. In the dream, a woman brought her a beautiful, bright shiny necklace, made of silver and other metals. Another necklace, of small quartz

crystals, lay knotted and tangled in my friend's lap. As she Focused, the tears of meaning came around the knotted necklace.

While the other necklace was bright and shiny and seemed more attractive, the one in her lap was her own. It was like her life: knotted and tangled, but still each crystal lovingly crafted. Saying these words, she welled up with tears.

The tears alerted her that she was on the right track. The meaning: I can love my own life, as it is,, with its mistakes and small crystals. I do not have to compare myself to the gaudy necklaces of others.

In her waking life, now, my friend wears her quartz crystal necklace as a reminder to follow her own path and feel good about herself. However, if she analyzed the dream without feeling the meanings, she might have made the opposite decision. She might have thought she was supposed to go out and find a shiny, new necklace, a shiny, new life.

I spent several weeks visiting people. I returned home depressed and hopeless, feeling that I had failed in life and had nothing. I canceled a party. I felt much too bad to entertain. As I Focused on the depression, tears came when I realized that, surrounded by people who had other lifestyles, women who were married and affluent and good house-keepers, I had lost touch with what mattered to me: the life I had chosen as a writer and single mother. As the tears flowed, I came back to life again, reconnecting with the meaning in my own life choices. I found a deep feeling of hopefulness and trust in my own choices and even felt like having a party!

Here's what experienced Focusers say about the connection between Focusing and tears:

"In Focusing, I look for the feeling of tears coming as a guide to the felt sense. When I have tears in Focusing, I have the experience of finding Me again!"

"Focusing and tears go together hand in hand to me. While Focusing works with or without tears, the major shifts are always accompanied by some tearing. It is my reflex response to sensing the truth of my being. It always feels so wonderful!!"

"Focusing is the only thing I can really do to help myself cry in a situation. Even when I don't sit down and do an 'official' Focusing session, just being quiet and attending to what I'm feeling can sometimes bring tears."

Tears As A Talisman

When tears come before the felt meaning, they say, "Pay attention. This matters to you. Find out why. Make words for the meaning." When the tears come in response to your attempt to find words for a felt meaning, they also say, "It's here. This is what matters. Take it seriously."

In both cases, your tears act as a talisman, keeping you on the track of what matters to you. Paying attention to what matters can help you decide what to do.

Here's what others say about tears and action decisions:

"Tears *make* my decisions. If I feel strongly enough to have tears about it, it is very, very important."

"In my normal, rather out-of-touch existence, I have a lot of ideas, options, plans, but often have difficulty knowing what I really should think or do--whether I'm rationalizing something, am in denial, deluding myself or what. Crying is one of the times when I really feel connected with some source of wisdom and guidance."

"I am afraid that, if I am not allowed to cry, I will lose my bearings, my capacity to know wrong from right. If deciding between two things, the one that moves me to tears gets my vote. Tears let me know what's important to me, also what is profound and perhaps universally human."

Tears and Spirituality

When you pay attention to bodily felt meanings, you find yourself listening to the "still small voice within" which many people find central to religious experience. If you are interested in finding spiritual meaning, Focusing can work as a form of prayer, a way of opening yourself to your Higher Power or Inner Wisdom. Campbell and McMahon (1985), Catholic priests who teach Focusing throughout the world, write about "biospirituality," Focusing upon felt meanings as a way of opening yourself to the possibility of Grace, a visitation from the Holy Spirit.

Human beings are touched and moved by many universal experiences: birth and death, excellence and failure, beauty and ugliness, caring and cruelty. These experiences keep us on track about what it means to be human. The information that comes from felt meanings seems connected to the wisdom of the Universe.

Many people cried at the movie, *Awakening*. Some of us went several times in order to cry. We brought our friends and lovers saying, "You've got to see this (meaning, "You've got to feel this...I want to share this profound feeling with you"):

As the story unfolds, a man slowly becomes paralyzed because of a neurological disease. A scientist finds a seeming cure. Slowly, the man comes to life again.

Through his eyes, we experience life in the moment, the beauty of simply being alive, seeing the sunshine and the ocean, touch another human through affection. We are moved to tears. Yes, life is beautiful. How could we have forgotten?

The scientist also awakens, coming out of his own isolation as he cares about the awakened man and is cared about by the nurse who helps him. We are touched. Our own sense of isolation responds to this moment of human contact. Yes, we want to be closer to other people. Isn't that the meaning of life?

But, slowly, the man begins to go to sleep again. The cure reverses itself, the disease reasserts its paralysis, the man is disappearing. We are all sobbing. This has happened us, too. We have gone from awakening to the loss of meaning, from hope to hopelessness.

But the man is not hopeless. He faces his loss, glorying in his moment of living, retaining his caring and dignity to the end. We, too, are urged to maintain our humanness in the face of obstacles.

HOW TO FOCUS

You can do Focusing right in the moment that you find yourself moved to tears. Simply notice the tears and turn your attention to your heart/chest/diaphragm area, asking "What's this about?" Within a minute, you'll find some words or an image about the felt meaning: "Oh, yeah. It's because someone is caring about me."

However, if you want to go further and find out why someone caring about you brings tears, you may want to sit down at a later date and go through a more purposeful, lengthy Focusing process. You commit yourself to sitting or lying down, closing your eyes, and taking ten or twenty minutes to go more deeply into the meanings.

I'll stop here for this article. You Focusers know the rest!

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