

David Rome

*Focusing for Meditators: Accessing the Wisdom of the Felt Sense*

Week Two: “Welcoming the Felt Sense: Dropping the Storyline”

April 9, 2022



Welcome to Week Two of “Focusing for Meditators.” Today’s theme is “Welcoming the Felt Sense: Dropping the Storyline.” Let’s start again with the GAP exercise in order to really become present to ourselves and open to our experience.

Bring attention to the body. Take a moment to find a comfortable position. Try to have a sense of really being in your body, and bring attention to where your body is resting on the earth, your seat, your ground. Just relax into the simplicity of resting on the earth, the sense of being grounded. Now, as you bring your awareness up into the head region, emphasize the sense of awareness and alertness. Focus especially on the sense of hearing. You can close your eyes if you like. We tend to be so visually oriented that there’s a great deal in the sound environment that we don’t notice. See what you can pick up just now, whether it’s loud or soft, any kind of sound taking place in your environment. This is awareness. Then groundedness and awareness meet together at the level of the heart in the quality of presence here, now. Grounded, aware, and fundamentally very simple. It is a simple sense of being present, regardless of whatever else may be going on in one’s life. Grounded, aware, presence.

Last week we focused on the felt sense and the focusing attitude, both of which we will continue to be working with. Let me say a little bit more about the focusing attitude. Frequently, there are aspects of ourselves that we don’t like. We prefer not to recognize them at all, or if they poke their ugly little heads up, we feel a sense of revulsion or negativity. There is a certain inner voice that most if not all of us have, which can be called the inner critic. It’s the voice that says, “You’re bad, you’re ugly, you’re stupid, you’re incompetent, you’re phony,” and so on. In focusing, we’re trying to be inviting to whatever wants to show up, but we don’t want to submit to the judgments of this inner critic. If you find that voice arising, saying, “This is stupid, what am I doing here,” just recognize that. You don’t have to reject that, but understand that that’s just a certain aspect of yourself, but it is by no means who you really are. When we hear this critical voice, it’s alright to acknowledge it and set it aside and come back to this inviting and welcoming

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and quite tender space. The focusing attitude is gentle and soft, but it's also strong. It's a strong kind of internal presence that won't be thrown off by negative thoughts or critical voices.

Today, I want to go further in experiencing the process of focusing, especially this notion of dropping the storyline. There are two kinds of dropping that take place. This is quite similar to what happens in mindfulness awareness practice. One is dropping the descriptiveness, dropping the stream of habitual thoughts or fantasies or feelings or whatever it may be. This is what I'm referring to as the storyline. Dropping the storyline is a willingness to pause the stream, suspend it, let go of it, or put it off to the side. It's not rejecting it, but it's not becoming involved and entangled with the storyline. This dropping is in some sense literally dropping the awareness down out of the head, which is where we usually think of the mind and the thoughts being, and into the physical body. It's being with the nonconceptual felt experience that is contained in our bodies and especially in the central torso region of the body.

At the same time, we're shifting our attitude from what we might call the conventional attitude, which tends to be outward focused and looking at objects and perceptions, looking for stimulation, toward a much more receptive quality of attention. This receptive quality is in some sense passive, but not passive in a weak way. It's more open, sensitive, and welcoming. This is what I've been referring to as the focusing attitude, a particular quality of presence in ourselves and presence to ourselves, to our own experience.

Let's go ahead and do an exercise. Think of a situation in your life, a problem, a challenge, maybe a decision that you need to make or an incident that occurred between you and someone else, something that is current in your life. Tell yourself the story to remind yourself of and remember the different details: she said this, and then I said that, and then she did this. That's the story. I want you to begin by finding a story like that, but not a made-up story, something that's from your actual experience. Tell yourself the story.

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Now, wherever you are in that story, even if you're mid-sentence, drop it. Just forget about the story. Simultaneously drop the attention and awareness down into the inner body. At first, you may not notice anything at all. That's alright. There's just a kind of blank space there. But you may also notice how the body is carrying that story—in a sense how the body has responded to your retelling that story, that situation, that problem. You may notice something in the gut or in the chest. Sometimes it's kind of small and precise; sometimes it's larger and more amorphous.

Now, pick up the story again. Let your attention come back up to more conventional thinking about the situation. There's nothing bad about this. In fact, it's good because it is through telling the story that we're also inviting the felt sense to come in the body. Now, drop it. Just let it go and really sink down into your present-moment felt experience. Perhaps you find something that has come as a felt sense that is very clearly connected with the problem, with the story, or perhaps you find something there but you're not sure if or how it's connected.

Let's do this one more time. Go back to the story. You can start over from the beginning, or you can pick up where you left off, but try to relive the situation. You can think about specific aspects of what the problem is or what happened. And drop it. Drop the storyline, and just come inside and settle. Enjoy just being with the inner space and the felt texture of your experience just now.

This will be the homework exercise for the next week. You can begin again with the GAP steps: grounded, aware, present; base, head, heart. Perhaps you already have a situation, or perhaps there already is something that you know is a problem or challenge in a felt sense way, but find one situation. It can be a small problem, or it can be the kind of problem that we struggle with over and over again. Spend some time with that issue, first by recalling the different aspects of it, telling yourself the story, and then dropping it. The pacing is up to you, but if you find yourself really getting into the story, then that's a good time to drop it, to really suspend the momentum of

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the discursive process. Just let the whole thing go and notice what the body is holding. I invite you to send comments or questions, and I hope to be with you next week for the third class, which is called “Consulting the Felt Sense: Intuitive Insight.” Thank you.