

# *Improving Vision Through Inner Awareness: Focusing and Seeing From The Core*

by  
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When we are present to our experience we experience everything more fully. When we are relaxed and fully aware of what we are seeing we see more clearly and comfortably. This experience of being fully aware and awake in the present moment is called being present. It includes all our senses: being aware of sensing our bodies, seeing what is here to be seen, hearing the sounds around us and smelling the scents in the air.

Often when we return from a good vacation we hold particular scenes in our minds that we can return to years later. They are vivid with beautiful images full of color, sound, sensations and aromas. At that time we were relaxed and attending just to the present moment. We felt fully alive and our senses were fully awake at that place in that moment, so our experience can stay with us in memory. Even if our vision is usually blurry, we might discover that we see quite clearly when walking to work on a beautiful spring day, or when looking at a dear friend across a room, or when reading a delightful story that conjures up rich images in our mind. We are fully there.

When the experience of being present is so wonderful, why are we not present all the time? The problem is that in any normal life we experience fear. When we experience fear an unconditioned, instinctual response is initiated: we can run away, stand and fight or freeze. Automatically, our pupils dilate, the eyelids retract, our heart rate increases, our digestive system slows down and the whole metabolic rate of the body prepares us to fight or flee. This is called the Reptilian Response, the sympathetic response, the stress response or the fight and flight response. It is initiated in the deepest, most primitive parts of our brains and is shared by all reptiles and mammals.

When we are aware of the fear as we are fighting, running away or hiding, we are still present. It is when we are overwhelmed by it that the difficulty arises.

Peter Levine in his book "Waking the Tiger", has an excellent example to illustrate this. Imagine an impala being chased by a cheetah. They are both racing at 70 mph. The impala's Reptilian Response is in full flow. Just as the cheetah leaps at the impala, the impala falls, even before the cheetah has touched it. The impala has been overwhelmed. Its system, which was in a hyper-aroused state, freezes. It becomes immobile.

The freezing or immobility response has two survival advantages. One is that the cheetah thinks its prey is dead and may drag it off to hide it in the bushes for later consumption. The impala may then awaken from this frozen state and escape in a moment when it is not being guarded. The second survival advantage is that when the impala goes into the immobility response, it enters an altered state of consciousness, which allows it to feel no pain if it is torn apart by the cheetah. It dissociates. When we dissociate we are no longer present and our senses become impaired.

This example is of a clear life or death situation and fortunately, most of us do not suffer such trauma. What happens to many of us is that we gradually develop the habit of dissociating during times of stress. We might escape into our heads, leaving the uncomfortable sensations of our pounding heart or dry throat behind; we might become very still hoping nobody will notice us; we might start telling jokes and cover up our fear so well that it gets buried deep inside us. At first we may just dissociate under particular circumstances. For example, a certain teacher may pick on us at school, so when we are around that teacher we dissociate, then if nothing happens to change this response we may start to dissociate around all teachers or as soon as we walk into school. When we find ourselves in difficult circumstances where we feel afraid, but still have to be there, dissociating works. We don't have to feel how awful it feels.

When we dissociate we also freeze. The sympathetic nervous system arousal still occurs but we cannot run away or fight, so we try to stop the response. Because it is a primitive, unconditioned response, just like the fast removal of our hand from a hot plate, our attempt to stop it results in its becoming frozen. The breathing becomes shallow, the muscles tight, the eye lids retracted, the pupils dilated, the blood pressure raised etc.

The undoing of these traumas, whether the acute and sudden or the chronic and slow is accomplished by becoming present to our selves, our resources and our experience. There are two particular forms of practicing this that we want to share with you at this conference. One of them is Focusing (Gendlin) and the other is Seeing from the Core (Gaddum Gordon).

We'll start with Focusing. "Focusing" was discovered by Eugene Gendlin in the 1960's, when he was a professor at the University of Chicago. He and his colleague, the psychologist Carl Rogers, became interested in why psychotherapy was helpful to some clients and not to others. Gendlin and his research assistants taped hundreds of hours of therapy sessions and, much to their surprise, concluded that 'successful' therapy did not have as much to do with the skill of the therapist as it did with something the client was already doing. They found that after listening to the tapes of many series of therapies, they could predict within the first session or two which would be successful and which not. In the successful therapies, the clients demonstrated from the very beginning, an ability to listen to the messages from their bodies, rather than staying in their heads.

When Gendlin realized the importance of taking the time to listen to the sensations of the body, he wondered whether it might be possible to teach people how to do it. He called the sensations that are in the body as a response to various feelings, thoughts or life situations, the 'felt sense'. He then discovered that it is possible to teach people to listen to it. This process he called 'Focusing'. At first, being a therapist himself, he thought of it as being particularly useful as a therapeutic tool, but later he came to teach it as a skill for decision-making, for getting out of the pattern of addictions and as a way of handling overwhelming emotions and stuck relationships.

Most of us have been taught since early childhood *not* to listen to our sensations. For instance, a child says: 'Mummy, I'm cold.' Mother might say: 'How can you possibly be cold, you have a thick sweater on.' What is the child to do? Either her body is giving her a wrong message, or her mother is wrong. Most likely she will decide to tune out the sensations of her body. Or a child has been sitting in school all morning: he starts squirming around in his chair; his body wants to move. But he has learned that he will get punished if he moves around too much, so he forces himself to sit still until the bell rings. He cannot afford to listen to his body. He has to control it with his mind. And so it goes. We become experts at not paying attention to the language of the body. This means that when our eyes are tired and strained it is quite easy for

us to ignore them in favor of meeting the deadline on a project for work.

Focusing is the process of listening to the messages from the body without judgment or criticism. Listening without trying to change anything and noticing what happens next. Gendlin discovered Focusing by noticing how people who are in touch with their bodies listen to them, and then developed techniques to mimic and teach that skill. Dr Bates discovered his method by studying what healthy eyes do, and developing techniques to mimic their habits.

Let's now explore Seeing From The Core. This is a way to tune into the body while seeing, so that seeing becomes embodied and not dissociated and frozen. It's a way in which to become more present to the Felt Sense within, and to the world around us at the same time.

When Rosemary began incorporating the Bates Method into her teaching she started, as many of us do, by teaching techniques. She noticed that some students got excellent results and others did not. And, that the results did not seem to depend upon the amount of time spent practicing the techniques. So she began to wonder whether the difference depended on *how* they were being practiced.

In observing how people's bodies change as they effort to see, she noticed the straining can be seen as an inclination forwards, as if they are reaching out with their eyes. Sometimes, they actually lean forward with the whole body, or they reach out with their chins; sometimes the body change seems to be on a more energetic level, as if there is energy coming out through the eyes. As people learn to relax this no longer happens. Eyes that are comfortable and not straining appear to sit easily in the head. They appear more settled, more alive and connected to something deeper inside. They also look more beautiful.

In her own journey of healing from myopia, anisometropia and astigmatism Rosemary experienced something similar. During the times when she sees perfectly clearly with good depth perception she notices she is relaxed and simultaneously aware of what she is seeing, feeling and hearing. She is present and connected to the world inside as well as to the world outside. As this experience of being present becomes more frequent in her life, she sees clearly more and more of the time. She calls it Seeing From The Core.

Seeing From The Core encourages one to be "home", to see with the mind rather than trying to see with just the eyes, to relax and *receive* the information entering the eyes. Seeing in this way gives one direct access to the Felt Sense and any emotions that may arise in response to what is seen and to other feeling states that may be present. When we are not "home", when we are not embodied, we become dissociated and it is easy to ignore and repress feelings.

One student of Rosemary's, a lawyer, noticed that when she read legal documents she did not get her headaches and eyestrain, but when she read for pleasure she did. As Rosemary and she explored reading from the Core she realized that she was present when reading the former, but absent when reading novels. She said it felt like she was gobbling up the words of the novel through her eyes. Some students access the Core at the solar plexus, while others access it in their chest or in their head. Some people describe it as "seeing with their heart."

Seeing From The Core is a very useful tool for teachers and students of Vision Improvement because like Focusing, it is *teachable and learnable*. It is a way to explore being relaxed while being in the world, a way to take the benefits gained through specific techniques into our daily lives. Most people who are not embodied don't know it; they think they are, because it is what they are used to. There is a Felt Sense of Seeing From The Core. It helps those of us who have become used to freezing and dissociating from our vision to remember what it feels like to see normally. It is an added step many of us need to take in becoming fully present. A student

said that she was walking down the street on her way to do an errand. At first she noticed she was just focused on the errand and not really seeing what was around her. She reminded herself to be more present. In order to be more present she had to slow down her pace, which she did, noticing that she could now breathe more fully. Then she asked herself if she were Seeing From The Core. She found that in order to see from her Core she had to walk even more slowly, and then as she did so the world became brighter, clearer and had even more depth. Her previous experience of being present was incomplete; it had not included her visual system.

Dr. Bates emphasized relaxation. Seeing From The Core is a way of becoming more relaxed in a dynamic way in the busy world in which we live. Learning to see better is a journey. The techniques of Seeing From The Core and Focusing, of developing an inner awareness, helps many people to see more comfortably and clearly. It is a practical way of learning to be more fully present in each moment. The CORE is a place to *live* from as well as a place to see from.

### References

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