

Detecting Camouflage: Focusing techniques for close discernment

[Key points: feel free to contact me]

We have all experienced 'a lot going on' within us, indecision and internal conflict. An image for this might be many fish in (our inner) sea, or animals in (our inner) jungle, cohabiting and sometimes fighting.

In nature, creatures sometimes hide in plain sight – camouflaged, difficult to discern.

Discerning includes two actions: we see a camouflaged animal by perceiving that it is there and distinguishing it from other things.

Gendlin often says: "more is coming." The "more" can be more about a particular thing or more things. We use that information to discern.

Sometimes important inner matters may be like a camouflaged animal.

Example: a friend suffering over the decision to move from one location to another. She's not a Focuser, but she said "when I think about leaving, I have a Yes and I have a No." There was also something else, hiding in plain sight: the belief that her happiness depended on making the right choice. When she saw this, she could also recognise that she wanted each location's best qualities; she was afraid of losing what she had; and worst, she felt at the mercy of the people in both places. Then she understood that she could look after her own happiness no matter where she was. Choosing was very different now.

The metaphor of camouflage inspires us to look more closely. The invisible animal can be big or small; in the open or behind other things; cowering or loud.

We must choose which inner voices to act upon. As Gendlin wrote, "you need not believe, agree with, or do what the felt sense just now says..." and yet we want to be guided from within. When Gendlin was a boy, he saw his father decide – from some inner information that Gendlin eventually called the felt sense – not to trust the man who proposed to smuggle the family out of Austria. Serious matters!

Often the hardest things to discern are our beliefs and assumptions. We tend to live blindly from them.

A particular camouflage analogy is useful here. Flounders are fish that lie still, flat on the sea floor, and blend in amazingly well.

The sea floor is vast and basic. It may experience cataclysmic upheavals – volcanoes, tectonic-plate shifts – but comparatively it is enduring and stable. I analogise it to our deep inner knowing of our truest self. I call this my Self, my soul, my ground of being, or what Cornell & McGavin call Presence. It also holds my deepest-held, self-defining values.

A flounder looks a lot like the sea floor but isn't. Beliefs and assumptions usually overlap with – and look or sound like – important principles. Expressing them, I may use some of the same words as to express my defining values.

Personal example: I care about tolerance and generosity of spirit. Not that I live up to these principles perfectly, but they matter to me in a sea-floor kind of way. Valuing them has helped me develop the empathic imagination to see through other people's lenses. Everyone (including me) tends to construct a narrative that justifies and makes sense of what they do, and it is useful to understand their narrative.

From childhood I was also set up by key individuals to believe that understanding their point of view meant I should also be able to accept whatever they did. If I objected, I was failing to be tolerant and generous-spirited. You can see that this is emotional blackmail, creating the conditions for abuse. When something in me said "I should not be permitting this," something else said, "I can understand why s/he thinks it's ok, so to be a tolerant person I must accept it."

That second voice was a flounder. It seemed like an organic part of the sea floor of tolerance and generosity of spirit, but it was not. I needed to discern the difference.

How?

"Is there more?" is like "am I really seeing an uninhabited jungle?" "Why do I feel like there's something funny about that tree?" You might see a little edge or an eye or a tail: "Hmmm, that's

odd. What is that, what does it attach to?" Focusing teaches us to invite, notice and explore that hmmm.

Camouflaged animals are easier to see when they move. Poke it! Query it. Come at it from multiple angles. Or sit and wait. There will be a little flutter eventually.

My friend, moving house, might have discovered her belief hiding in plain sight, if she had asked herself, "Yes this feels bad. What about it feels so bad?" If something feels awful, look again!

Notice when you do something so naturally and with such a deep feeling of rightness that there is no hesitation ("Flow," or "The Zone"). That feeling is a good indicator of deep knowing.

This is not about feeling good (like eating ice cream) but about feeling right. And it's about using our Focusing skills to check, deeply and patiently. I believe that when you sit with something, if it's a bad choice you will begin to notice some shadows coming. Something in you might suddenly feel very tired. Or if you hear a 'should', pay attention: who says so, and what is at stake?

Questions could include (if you prefer statements, reframe as "Let's see if...."):

Is what is coming maybe not just one thing, but two things intertwined? Three?

What do I believe about this? What do I know? Am I sure?

What is so obvious I don't mention it? If someone said it, I would respond, "Well, of course!"

Does it feel movable? Solid?

What am I hearing? Something whispering, whose sound is lost in the noise?

Is there a "should" ?

Is there something shaped like "if... then...." ?

Is this done? (= the obverse of "is there more?")

Remember the Inner Relationship Focusing approach to all of these – namely, "something in me...." – continually check if it is more than one "something".

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