

The Tasting, Dipping & Diving workshop

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Ram's presentation, title: "Tasting, Dipping, Diving - Three modes of experiencing, well-being, and the creation of meaning", is a tribute and reference to Gene Gendlin's ECM (experiencing and the Creation of Meaning). In this workshop Ram presented some of the findings in his research on "The goodness feeling in nature", and explored together with participants their own experiences of well-being-in-place, through experiencing, theorizing, and playing.

1. Backgrounding:

Well-being-in-place is a universal experience. Some environments have a definite positive effect on us, while others do not. In such wellness inspiring places, we become filled with a distinctive, bodily sense of well-being that sometimes lingers long after our visit, like an aftertaste. This experience may be described as similar to itself in the same way that satiety is similar to itself, irrespective of the food we ate.

The project to describe this experience, began from a very practical purpose, a wish to improve my ability as a landscape architect to design places that inspire wellness. As I looked for subjects who could be articulate about such an embodied, pre-discursive experience, I found focusing and the philosophy of Eugene Gendlin, which became both the method of research, and the conceptual foundation to explain my findings.

The research took place in 2013 with a group of 15 focusing students in an oak wood in Israel. They were instructed to look for a "A place that feels right", and once found, remain there for 20 minutes whilst articulating their experience. The transcripts of these sessions became my raw material for examining the evolution of the experiencing of goodness-place.

2. Experiencing: from memory

This was followed by a short focusing exercise. Each of the participants chose a place that "if they had five spare minutes, they would like to spend them there", and with my guidance, took time to relish some of its experiential aspects. We then returned to the group and gave reports of the qualities of the places and how they affected us. These reports had many themes in common with those of my previous study, and served as a good introduction to discuss some of my findings.

3. Theorizing: The research findings

The focusing transcripts yielded many common themes. Most striking, a significant number of the documented experiences contained explicit descriptions of wonder at feeling at once a "boundlessness" between inner and outer realities whilst maintaining a solid sense of self. In all sessions, there was a clear development of meaning beginning with attention to an "appearing", a sensory awareness to "something calling" for attention, followed by a series of inductive steps, and cumulating in "insight", a fresh formation of new meaning. To illustrate their parallel nature, I will use the metaphor of a "downward" movement into the depths of experiencing, and of an "upward" movement of expression towards articulate abstractions:

Experiencing - three depths of exploring the "not-yet-known" edge of "something there":

I. **Tasting**: is a very careful noticing of an "it" in "me". Cautiously "tasting it" (like one does when encountering an unfamiliar fruit, tasting with the tip of the tongue - or any other sense

for that matter), maintaining composure and separateness from "it", as if ready to retreat at any given moment. At this level of experiencing "inside" and "outside", "It" and "I", are very prominent.

II. Dipping: is an allowing the experience to take hold. The experience happens at all open channels of experience simultaneously. Like *a cool green splash* of dipping into a pond. An "I am in It" experience. An "I" can still sense the flow of incoming perceptions as separate from itself, but it becomes more difficult to distinguish between them, as they come "as one" (*cool green splash*).

III. Diving: is an abandoning of all boundaries to the experience, like diving below the water, forgetting the water surface above, and the deep bottom below... in diving "It" and "I" are no longer separable. At this level, sensation (sensing) and the creation of meaning (making sense) are one.

Creating meaning - can be described in three "rising" levels of explicating:

I. Noticing: At first, there is just a noticing of "something there", but it is not yet possible to articulate exactly what it is, and why it is significant.

II. Contexting: Following the noticing, one begins to make sense of the appearing situation by relating the particular experience to one's private-world-of-meaning. This is significant, because at every step of the creation of meaning, it is apparent that meaning is coming forth inductively, (i.e. from experience, and not from other previously formalized concepts). At this stage, memories, metaphors, and feelings appear.

III. Universalizing: As one reflects on the situation, repetitively returning to the sensing (experiencing) and making sense (articulating) the meaning grows more and more generalized so as to befit more situations culminating in an "aha" moment. The "Something that Appeared" though sometimes un-pleasant, triggered a movement of attention towards "it" and a process of becoming acquainted with "it" leading to an "insight" coupled with a physical sense of relief, which was in itself, experienced as the very experience of goodness. The main insight arising from this study, is that the goodness-feeling-in-nature is closely related to the formation of meaning: at first in an experiential preverbal form; and then gradually, given time and attention, the meaning emerges as a freshly conceptualized insight.

Design is a field which requires an ability to work with implicit meanings, yet the general theory of design lacks the vocabulary to address these processes. In my view, a better understanding of the relatedness of experiencing to the creation of meaning, and the role of discursive / non-discursive places may support new ways of thinking about possible environmental features obstructive or conducive to the genesis of such a goodness-experience.

This research is now being expanded to include focusers from all over the world. Read my invitation to participate on the global forum section.

4. Playing: [Stonesensing](#)

At the end of the workshop, I presented the "Stone-Sensing" game, developed for introducing the concept of "felsensing" to landscape architecture students. Grounded in the ancient Japanese art of "evoking meaning with stones", the game invites one to follow the sense of "what is right" in the placing of stones in sand.

The game is at once fun and easy to play for anyone, and can therefore be a fun introduction to felt sensing, and is also a living metaphor for some of the principles of the process model. On another level, the game is rooted in a great artistic and spiritual tradition, and therefore may have great potential to other fields of creative study and practice.

The game was particularly adapted for the Cambridge conference, and is now available with full instructions [HERE](#).

Experiencing Well-Being In-Place

This is a call and invitation to the international Focusing Community to take part in a fun way in a pioneering focusing research on the experience of well-being in-place. Based on the observation that experiencing well-being is universal and deeply connected to the environments we're in, this study is intended to explore this universality by collecting cross-cultural descriptions of experiencing natural, urban and country settings.

Any focuser at any level can participate. The protocol is simple, a lot of fun, and a great focusing exercise; like going on a polar expedition right outside one's doorstep.

Focusing teachers in particular may find it useful as an exercise in one of their classes: a focusing partnership goes outdoors, alternating roles, looking for a place "that feels right" and documenting each other's session. The experience of focusing both "inwards" and "outwards" at the same time is very rich, and the simultaneous or post-focusing writing exercise provides a way of deepening the learning experience, and an introduction to the meticulousness of focusing in a TAE way.

This is also an open invitation to any likeminded focusers interested to explore the subject of sensing well-being or "rightness" in place, to read the abstract of "[The Goodness Feeling in Nature](#)" presented at the conference, and to collaborate in a research, correspondence, or any other way that presents itself.

I'll be delighted to receive any thoughts and responses: ram@rameisenberg.com

A detailed protocol of the exercise is available [HERE](#).