

A Felt Sense of Astrology – Participation and Re-enchantment.

(Theme - Courage, Joy & Healing – Being An Astrologer in the World)

Powerpoint 1 - Title

When I saw the theme for today, my first thoughts were “what can I say about being an astrologer in the world” that all these other astrologers might find interesting?

I came to the conclusion that all I can share is my own subjective experience. That’s gone through quite a lot of changes recently, especially in the last 4 years. And I’m very aware that it’s just one view, and that we all have our own unique perspectives, each of which are valuable in themselves.

What I want to share today is a personal account of how my own experience has shifted from a fairly left-brained analytical approach, to a more holistic, intuitive one over the last 4 years or so, how the process of Focusing has catalysed this for me, and how my experience of studying with the Faculty has supported and developed that.

There’s also a question for me around whether this is a shift in how astrologers are approaching our subject generally right now. Is this a time in which we are becoming more experiential and holistic? And is there a link back to the late 80s/early 90s when I was first enchanted by astrology and what I’m sensing today. It certainly felt at the time that experiential approaches to astrology were very active then.

(Re-enchantment) When I first began studying astrology back in the late 80s and early 90s, I was in my early 20s, and I was completely enchanted by it. I was accepting of everything I learned and read, taking courses, devouring books, and awed by all of it. I wonder if this is how we all are when we first discover astrology? Or could it have been a reflection of the Uranus/Neptune conjunction? There was a magical quality about that time.

Then, as I got older, I had more of a left-brain, logical and analytical approach - a phase of critical re-examination of what I read. Questioning: does this work for me? Coming from the head, cerebral. Testing it out.

I have training in therapeutic counselling and worked as a hypnotherapist for a number of years. In 2010 I came across an unread book on my shelf called “Focusing” by Gene Gendlin. It had sat there for 2 years, but this was obviously my time to read it. And light bulbs went off – I was resonating very strongly with this book! As a result, I took the Certificate in Focusing in 2010, and I’m now taking the Practitioner Training. As part of the training, I’m doing a practical project on Focusing with Astrology. It’s still ongoing, but there are some findings to share here.

In 2010, when I ‘found’ the book and started my Focusing training, my secondary progressed Sun moved into Cancer in my 12th house, and SP Mercury was building up to the process of stationing retrograde, also in Cancer in the 12th and trine SP Neptune. The exact station is next month. In the watery imaginal realm. Able to gestate there, like in the womb. But putting concepts into precise words seems harder as a result! Much more vague and dreamy.

It was also, interestingly, my Secondary Progressed Full Moon. Perhaps reflected in the feeling that this was finally a therapeutic process which really ‘fitted’ for me. That I’d ‘come home’ to something. I found Focusing and, in the exploration of the process, very soon I started to experience spontaneously what I could call a ‘felt sense’ of astrology. I’ll explain the term felt sense

in a moment. More right-brained, more holistic. It feels like '**re-enchantment**', the same sense of wonder I had when I first began to study astrology, but in a way that comes from **inside** rather than outside. It was as though my chart could speak to **me** now rather than me imposing my own interpretations upon it from outside. Interpretations that perhaps were sometimes tired and over-analysed, that perhaps made assumptions or were too definite. Can we become too accustomed to a certain way of seeing or analysing our charts?

And wow! Such richness and colour, and so many new insights. And a sense of connection and participation with the symbols I hadn't experienced before. Everything felt fresh and new. It reminds me of when I had a Reiki attunement and it was as though someone had turned up the vividness of all the colours around me. It has also encouraged me to explore a more experiential approach to astrology generally.

What is Focusing?

Focusing is a process developed by Gene Gendlin, an American psychotherapist and philosopher – he carried out research (over a 15-year period) into what worked and what didn't work in psychotherapy, and concluded that it wasn't about the particular therapy technique or therapist, but about what the client was doing inside themselves that determined whether they experienced successful results from therapy. He developed a 6-step process out of this, outlined in his small book "Focusing", and since then the process has developed and flowered over the years. The particular branch I am training in is called "Inner Relationship Focusing" developed from Gendlin's original ideas by Ann Weiser Cornell. But they are still very connected.

Focusing definition (Powerpoint 2)

"In a nutshell, Focusing, as developed by Eugene Gendlin, is the process of listening to your body in a gentle, accepting way and hearing the messages your inner self is sending you. This process honours the wisdom and subtle level of knowing that speaks to you through your body." Ann Weiser Cornell (website)

When you are focusing you turn inward, often with closed eyes, though not always. You can do it by yourself or with a partner to reflect back for you. It's often preceded by a body scan – taking a few minutes noticing or sensing into the different parts of your body, from your feet, up to your head, for example, just to settle in and slow yourself down. It's quite meditative, but with more of an intention, and it's actually much easier to practice than to describe! You bring your attention in to the whole central torso area from throat down to base of spine, and allow whatever wants your attention to come into your awareness. Another approach, more relevant to working deliberately with astrology, is to use a symbol or an image or issue and connect in with it, bringing your attention to it and forming a 'felt sense' of what comes.

Felt Sense (Powerpoint 3)

Gendlin gave the name "felt sense" to the unclear, pre-verbal sense of 'something' — the inner knowledge or awareness that has not been consciously thought or verbalized — as that 'something' is experienced in the body. It is not the same as an emotion. This bodily felt 'something' may be an awareness of a situation or an old hurt, or of something that is 'coming' — perhaps an idea or insight. Crucial to the concept, as defined by Gendlin, is that it is unclear and vague, and it is always more than any attempt to express it verbally. Gendlin also described it as "sensing an implicit complexity, a wholistic sense of what one is working on". (Wikipedia)

I don't usually like to quote Wikipedia, but this seemed to sum up the felt sense very well. You could begin to notice what a 'felt sense' feels like by closing your eyes, bring attention to that inner area and say to yourself "everything in my life is absolutely fine" – Did you get a twinge of some

sort, or a subtle funny 'gut feeling' perhaps? Because pretty much everyone has something that they're not happy with in their life, so this statement doesn't generalise completely true to our body wisdom. That's a felt sense, it may not be clear what it means yet, but you can stay with it and more will come. This idea that there is always more is important here, it stops the process closing down, and stops assumptions (like "ah, I know what this is") being made too soon.

Coming from "Presence"

That 'felt sense' is approached from a non-judgemental place, a place of openness and gentle curiosity as you might (ideally) relate to a friend. Ann Weiser Cornell calls this place "Presence"

So you could acknowledge, or 'say hello' to what is there, and begin by describing it. Perhaps a word or a colour, a sensation, or a thought or image. 'Hear' what it says fully (sometimes it might not want to communicate at all, and that's ok), be open to any new feeling, word, sensation, symbol, image, memory, bearing in mind that the felt sense is an ever changing process – these perceptions need 'checking back in' and there is always space 'at the edge' for more to come. An openness to there being more. So Gendlin values that unclear area, that vagueness, where we don't have assumptions and are just waiting with openness and 'keeping company' with that unclear 'something'. There's a lot to this approach, more than we have time to go into here, but hopefully this gives an idea, and I'll give some examples shortly.

Felt Shift

A sense that something has changed as a result of the felt sense focusing, which could perhaps be signified by a sigh, or a sense of lightening in some way, or the feeling in the body can shift and change. This can often be an 'aha' moment, when a particular word really fits, for example.

You may find that one word may not be quite it – then look for another, or maybe use two words – for example, it might be 'something like' anxiety, but not quite, there's more... The felt sense only seems to lead to a shift like this if it gets that very specific word or description or image.

As previously mentioned, an important part of the process can often be having a companion with you to facilitate, and to reflect back the words you use in a helpful way. There isn't time to go into that here but, with a partner there, it can make it a lot easier to keep your attention and not to drift off into reverie or even go to sleep!

The Scream – Powerpoint 4.

This is an image that came to me from a Focusing session working with Saturn. Edvard Munch's The Scream. What came initially was an image, rather than a word. I then checked that back in with the 'felt sense' in my body and more came as a result. All our associations are so individual and unique: your images, words, memory, sensations or stories around Saturn will be completely different from mine, and what comes will invariably surprise you! It will also bring new insights and very possibly a shift in your relationship with that archetype. The process, the interaction, and the relationship are always changing, and over time it's very rewarding to watch and track this through regular focusing sessions.

Some things I've found helpful through this project work:

- Other experiential methods feed into focusing very well, and focusing can also deepen and inform these, (for example when using empty chair work we can 'check in' with the body when taking a particular role, to see if it fits).

- Intention: Collect associations with particular planets – images, pieces of music, gemstones, objects, etc. Even making an altar if you want to develop the ritual side further.
- Starting with drawing – draw the symbols, slowly, deliberately, meditatively even. Either in the chart or separately.
- Free association with the symbols. Whatever words come. Then focusing with whatever comes from this to open it out further.
- Journaling – keeping a regular record of the process. Also you can add drawings in there too. Colour, be creative.

Many of these ideas, and much more background around them, came from or were explored further by Cat Cox, and Richard Swatton in their talks at the AA's Magic of Astrology Conference last year, and also from experiential astrology books – in particular those of Babs Kirby, Prudence Jones and Barbara Schermer. I'm very grateful to be able to pick up these techniques and explore them, and have been very inspired by what I've read and heard. Highly recommended if you want to explore experiential astrology more. It does seem as though there has been a lot of recent focus in this area, with the AA Conference theme, the Magic of Astrology, offering us some really great talks. Also the Myth, Astrology and Imagination edition of the AA Journal, from the beginning of this year. And last year The Mountain Astrologer Magazine had an experientially themed edition. I have been really grateful for Cat Cox's approach, as Faculty tutor at last year's Summer School when we were doing Module 6 – she inspired me to pay more attention to the space, intention and the role of ritual. And then expanded on that in her talk at the Conference.

But back to the hands-on stuff...

Sensing into the chart by drawing it – as Cat Cox described in her talk – is a technique I find very helpful. Many of these experiences I'm having are probably common to people who practice experiential astrology regularly in similar ways, but they have been new to me. Sit with a large blank piece of paper, A3, and deliberately, slowly, place our planets in the circle, perhaps some colour in there for fire, earth, air, water, etc. However we like. There could be associated drawings, for people who are more artistic (or even if you aren't particularly!). But just drawing the symbols slowly, deliberately, and, **staying with the felt sense** of drawing each symbol, perhaps periodically stopping, closing your eyes, checking inside and making a few notes. When finishing, close your eyes and ask if any particular planet needs to speak first? See where that is felt in the body, etc.

Interestingly, outer events can feed inner focusing work, e.g. blustery weather, or this weekend, for example, at my focusing share when someone was drilling outside: the drilling coincided with a felt sense. And you can be drawn to focus with that – it seems to then come back to relevant issues for us, or sometimes it 'coincidentally' fits and reflects our process.

And there can be a spilling over of the process (which will generally continue on a conscious or unconscious level) into dreams, which then in turn can also be focused with and kept track of in a journal.

Saturn as an example:

When I first began focusing, I found it hard even to have an awareness of Saturn. I would get a sense of something critical or disapproving or cynical, which located itself outside my body, above my right shoulder somewhere generally. Not even communication at first. This shifted into my body over time, I eventually got some sense of being able to 'say hello', would get shifting imagery around that and finally experienced more of a response, a sense of dialogue.

Deliberately focusing with the symbol – this started as I wondered how it would be to regularly focus with a particular symbol (like Saturn's symbol) over a period of time. Does it deepen, does it change, does your relationship with it change? Finding out how to 'be with' the symbol – where do I carry it in my body, how do I experience it, do I recognise it. It's important not to just recall what we have learned about the archetype, but to have a quality of openness, perhaps meditating with symbol. Letting go of assumptions, so we can sense **freshly** into what's there, what it's saying to us, on a personal level. (Because of course everyone's Saturn is very different.) And then 'checking that back in' – asking the felt sense if it fits before allowing it to open more fully. Using a combination of open-eyed free association, then closed eyes, 'checking' with the felt sense seems to work well. A few personal snippets for Saturn's symbol:
(NB My Saturn is in Aries in the 10th, conjunct my MC, in a wide square to Venus in Cancer in the 12th house)

Sense of a down-turned mouth on that bottom curved part of the symbol. The word 'dour'.

A grave – the hump of the symbol being a fresh mound, with the cross on it.

*Mental processes narrating in the background as well: "Yes, Saturn is about death, the end of things, father time" Then moving deliberately back to the unclear sense – what is fresh – what **isn't** known yet?*

It becomes more personal gradually. Something about the curved 'slope' (on the symbol), the word 'chore', needing to climb the slope, the hard work in that, needing to take time.

Checking all this back in. Then the sense of 'goal' – the cross on top of the symbol becoming X marks the spot.

Image from an old black and white Western – the lonely grave on top of the hill, doesn't have a name on it. (There's something more here about being remembered, not forgotten)

Sense of sadness and loneliness, but that's not the right wording. 'Desolate' fits and gives a sense of shift. Other words resonate also. Melancholy. Toil. Worked to death. Film "Once Upon A Time in the West" – Chiselled men, who don't have any emotion, they're still... like they're made of stone, who don't speak...

Line from a David Bowie song "And the clock waits so patiently on your song..." A sense of my head pulling down. Tiredness, pointless, all the fighting, too tired. Bleak. It wants me to do things, but at the same time it stops me, it pulls on my legs, pulls head under the covers – paradox is here. It pushes and pulls at the same time. Sensing how it is to be with that.

"You're a rock and roll suicide", it berates. The 'something' that berates sits with its back to me, hunched, like the hunch on the symbol. Carries a heavy burden, is very still. Has large hands, they can hold a lot. Something else in me also feels like a naughty schoolgirl in his presence. Acknowledging that part also. The word gnarly, gnarled – he is gnarled. Like hewn. Large hands, really strong, really capable. Sense of strength really felt there.

Grave... the word Gravititas? Bearded like the artisan image. Sense that he has seen everything - so much time, so much experience. Solar plexus feels much calmer now: there has been a shift.

image of Michelangelo's David – a black and white high-res photo I saw of the detail of the hand, the massive stone hand. Words and insights around that.

Then a photo I had seen of an old man's hand, very big, gnarled, again in black and white, but holding a small bird in the open but gently cupped palm. There can be both. Strength, resilience, but also compassion can exist alongside this.

(Edited)

Working with Saturn like this has been deeply enriching, and difficult at times. It can be hard sometimes to be able to 'be with' the archetype from a place of 'presence' without being overwhelmed or identified with it, and this can be the case with other planets also, of course.

Bringing it back to personal meaning – what has this been about for me – what is fresh, what is new, that was previously unclear? For example, an insight that when words like bleak and melancholy came, these had a personal resonance, and how is it to be with that? Sensations of hopelessness, of hitting rock bottom, and of finally accepting that, of being resigned to something. But also something else that says you can't feel that rock bottom place, that sense of no hope. It says "cheer up" and it's not ok with other people if you are like this. There was a sense of something very 'bare-boned' here and an importance to really 'getting to the bottom' of something. A question that created a shift for me was "*How do you know where your foundations are otherwise? How do you know how strong you can be? How much you can endure, how much you are capable of?*" (Note, I have experienced a transit of Pluto square to Saturn recently)

Putting flesh on the bones of what all this is about for you on a personal level and getting a felt sense of what that is IN YOURSELF. You can then identify with that place in you and notice the changing relationship. It's an archetype, but you can resonate with this and relate to it on a personal level. And the planets are not in a void, they are in a sign, or house, or aspect, so there is a complex associated with that. As I worked with Saturn I frequently saw the square to Venus in Cancer popping up, for example.

VENUS Powerpoint 5

Venus example. A few images of what came from a Venus focusing session, just in contrast! Focusing session on the symbol. Fuzziness round edges interesting given it's in my 12th house natally, hidden away.

Transcript:

Circle with cross underneath. Also symbol for Ankh is here too. Sense of the difference. Shape of the two – Ankh not round at the bottom.

*Something about intensity of focus in that shape (top of ankh) which is like a candle flame and an odd association with doing a yoga session – an inverted pose, looking at the gap between my legs and the outline looking like a candle flame. A still candle flame. Something about that 'still fire' – in my body. I have a sense of Energy is too vague a word. Something to do with **focus and intensity together**.*

*Very aware of where I am sitting – pelvic area, almost '**squatting**' in a sense. (Even though I was sitting in a chair) Image of Venus figurines. Pear-shaped statues. Fertility. Grounded process of being. Something there about creation and a line from a Kate Bush song – oh, what is it...?*

*"There's room for the life in your womb... and inside of you can be two... there's room for a life in your womb, woman..." Upbeat, real sense of **celebration** about it as well. I can hear it in my head – see her doing this (dancing in my seat, smiling).*

Now some strange thing about being symmetrical as well – something about a line down the middle and being the same on both sides (?)

This symmetrical thing – I don't know what that's about, but it feels like I'm sitting in quite a symmetrical way and kind of just.... Yeah...

Centred. Ah – so there's something about the area here (touching lower stomach)– it is centre.

Which I wouldn't normally say. My centre feels much lower than usual, hips, bottom area. Doesn't really touch ground (as I'm on a chair) but something about GROUND. Earth? There.

Now a little kind of 'nose-wrinkly' thing going on. Almost as though she is winking at me (laughs). A sense of someone saying 'Yep! I haven't seen you for a while!' (hearing that and letting 'her' know I hear it) A kind of familiarity, of not having been there for a while. I'm just thanking that. I've missed you! Feels like a place to close...

Note –Venus in Cancer, 12th house, mutual reception with Moon in Taurus. Sun and Mercury also in Taurus.

Shame we can't share the actual music in the talk! Music comes into the focusing process a lot, it seems 😊

There was a real shift in energy after this short session which was quite handy for dancing later!

Conclusions, extra comments

Could our astrological clients work in this same way, without the depth of astrological knowledge? I'm hoping to explore this more fully.

Prudence Jones talks in *Creative Astrology*, (p.6). about whether the client needs the astrologer to interpret for them, or if it is possible to facilitate them to unfold and explore this for themselves. She writes: *"To be sure, both skill and experience need talent and effort to develop, but since astrologers must assume that some part of every person is in tune with astrological cycles, then an intuitive ability to interpret its signals for oneself would seem to lie dormant in us all."*

In astrology we are familiar with the idea that there are many voices within us – we see the players on the stage – the planets in our charts – and recognise their sometimes harmonious but often contradictory relationships.

Those archetypes communicate, and we can be open to them, to see if we can, respectfully, have a conversation. Or, perhaps more importantly, simply to 'be' with them. To more clearly observe our relationship with them, and their relationships with each other. Those different 'parts' of ourselves. The word 'parts' doesn't quite fit because it seems to imply something static, when in fact, it is more like a process, an interaction, which is always shifting and changing – a relationship. Our charts speak to us. And that is just awe-inspiring in itself. And we need to be respectful of these archetypes because they are so powerful and simultaneously inside and outside of ourselves. We are speaking to the gods. Even the shadow parts of ourselves need that respect. Perhaps especially those. Anything we ignore, dislike, shut down on, automatically becomes more powerful, stronger. We have blocked it, which is why being able to begin to 'turn to' that difficult 'something' is so important – non-giving attention. It can begin with simple acknowledgement: "Yes, I know you're there".

Focusing offers a process to facilitate that, a useful tool we can add to the experiential toolbox. We can locate ourselves somehow, through that interaction. Not in order to consciously push for change, but in order to more fully accept. And by holding that space, and that quality of non-judgmental acceptance (not always easy), awareness can develop, and it seems change and healing can often come anyway.

Powerpoint 6

Bill Harris *"Let whatever happens be okay"*

Ann Weiser Cornell – *The Radical Acceptance of Everything* (book title)

The importance of allowing the body to speak seems key, trusting it to know its own process, and its ability to 'carry forward' as Gene Gendlin calls it. Perhaps from what has been stuck previously. He also makes the important point that all this is only valuable if it carries into your day-to-day life and creates changes. A change in awareness, an inner change, or more obvious outer expressions.

What can Focusing contribute to astrology? Focusing offers a process to experience astrology from the **inside**, a quality of non-judgmental openness to communicating with the astrological archetypes, without prior assumptions. It stresses the importance of 'sensing freshly' into these places each time, with acceptance and curiosity, and it guides us to come from a place of

'Presence' so we can gently find the right distance in order to form a relationship – not so close that we are identified, but not so far that we are dissociated from the interaction.

We spend much of our time in the fast paced world 'out there'. And, as Carl Jung said "*When an inner situation is not made conscious, it appears outside as fate.*" So it makes sense to slow down and find ways to regularly move inside, to shift our awareness with whatever methods best suit us. That could be through focusing, but of course there are many other valuable routes.

The poet Rumi expresses the philosophy behind Focusing well in his poem, The Guest House:

GUEST HOUSE POWERPOINT 7

Rumi poem, The Guest House.

THE GUEST HOUSE

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

-- Jelaluddin Rumi, (1207-1273)
translation by Coleman Barks

And I'd like to give the last word to Carl Jung **(Powerpoint 8)**
Who looks outside dreams, who looks inside, wakes.

References and further reading.

Ann Weiser Cornell, *A Radical Acceptance of Everything.*

Ann Weiser Cornell website - <http://focusingresources.com/>

Gendlin Focusing website - <http://www.focusing.org/>

Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing*.

Prudence Jones *Creative Astrology*

Barbara Schermer *Astrology Alive*

Babs Kirby *Experiential Astrology*

Richard Swatton – *From Symbol to Substance, Training the Astrological Intuition*.

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Cat Cox *Astrological Practice, A Magical Approach*, AA Conference 2013 recording.