

THE FELT SENSE OF SELF

If we are feeling better about ourselves, then we hold ourselves differently; we walk differently; we feel differently; and we see things differently. Then we ‘feel’ a whole lot better about ourselves; we ‘feel’ our Self; and we ‘feel’ a sense of our Self. How can we get back to this feeling?

Exercise

This exercise is designed to help you get back a ‘felt sense’ of your Self. It is in three sections and each part has three parts. The exercise should take about 15 minutes. You can do it anywhere: and at any almost time; though obviously not when you are working or driving a car. You can do it on a bus, or on the train to work. It is probably best to do it whilst sitting down, rather than lying down. You can do it whilst walking – say on your morning exercise route or with the dog. It is also best to practice this regularly until it becomes more like second-nature: until it becomes your usual, proper sense of Self. This exercise is one way, if you start using it, on a regular basis. There are, of course, many other ways, but these usually involve other people or events. This you can do for yourself, by yourself, quietly and regularly. As you do it, you will build in your own changes and modifications – so that it works for you! As you do it, you should find that you get an increasing feeling of your Sense of Self.

First Section

- **First Part:** Become more aware of your breathing. You are (obviously) breathing all the time: every moment of every day: but how often are you aware of your breathing? We breathe basically in two different ways. There is the belly-breathing method that is encouraged in Yoga. This is where your belly moves in and out and – because of your diaphragm – the movement in the belly draws air in, or pushes it out, of your lungs: so it works a little like a bicycle pump. The second basic method of breathing is a ‘bellows-type’ of breathing. You often do this if you have just run up a couple of flights of stairs. This is where your chest expands and your rib cage expands, and the air is drawn in and out of your lungs by a bellows-type of action. When we are very anxious or afraid, our breathing becomes quite shallow and quite ‘high’; panting a little, with most of the breathing action happening in the throat. When we are anxious, we also tend to breathe in and hold; and then breathe in and hold: we take more air in, but don’t breathe out very much. When the fear or stress or tension goes, then we breathe out a lot and start to relax. So, how are

you breathing now? How much, how often, and where? Just become aware of your pattern of breathing. Spend a couple of minutes re-connecting with your pattern of breathing.

- **Second Part:** You are not just breath: you also have a body. So, spend a couple of minutes becoming more aware of your body. You are probably sitting on a chair: become aware of the chair against your back and bottom. You may be sitting in a particular position: arms folded, or not; legs crossed, or not; become aware of this position. You may be wearing a watch, or a belt, or a necklace, or something: become aware of the physical sensations of wearing these objects. Become conscious of the feeling of your clothes against your skin: your shoes may be a little tight – whatever! We receive all of these sensations into our body all of the time: just become more aware of all of these sensations. Become aware of your body as a living, functioning organism: you have quite an amazing body: it mostly works very well for most of the time: 60-70 years of non-stop functioning. Appreciate it a little now: spend a couple of minutes being amazed!

- **Third Part:** So, you now are a breathing, aware body. Now, become aware of the environment that you are in. There are lots of things around you: sights, sounds, smells, textures, temperatures, qualities of light, noises outside the house, etc. Spend a minute or two becoming aware of your breathing body in the environment that it is in, at this moment in time. Become more aware of the sensations and affects of the environment around you: the smell of the room you are in; the hum of the computer (if there is one); the noises in the street outside; birdsong perhaps. Spend a couple of minutes ‘being’ in the environment around you. This is all part of You being You, and becoming more your Self, in the Here and Now.

Second Section

- **First Part:** You are not just a body in the here-and-now: you also have feelings: lots of them. There are those feelings that are more on the ‘surface’: easily accessible. Today, you are reasonably happy because ... (hopefully) ... the sun is shining; or not so fine because you have just had an argument with your partner or child or work colleague; or someone who you thought liked (or didn’t like) you said something nasty (or nice) about you; or you are looking forward to the weekend, and so forth. Spend a little time, a couple of minutes, in just contacting and being more aware of all those different ‘surface’ – here-and-now – feelings.

- **Second Part:** Underneath the surface feelings, there are lots of other – often contrasting – feelings. People that we basically like, also have some irritating (possibly infuriating) habits; whilst we may love someone, we can also really dislike ‘this’ or ‘that’ about them, or dislike them when they do ‘this’ or ‘that’; we love our children dearly, and we are also sometimes really infuriated by them; we may really want to move to another town, but we are also scared to lose

our friends here. We are basically a nice person, and sometimes we can get very angry, or jealous, or we can have mean thoughts. We have to become aware of these ‘mixed’ or ‘secondary’ feelings, and then perhaps we can work through, or with, some of these conflicts. Spend a couple of minutes just allowing your awareness of some of these conflicting emotions: you won’t be able to sort them out in these few minutes, so just notice them, and hold your awareness of them. Let them bubble up, and then breathe and let them go on out.

- **Third Part:** Below these conflicting emotions, there are our deeper, basic feelings: our ‘gut’ feelings. These are beyond dispute: they cover things like the horror of warfare; the fear of violence; the basic human desire for peace and calm; a love of gentleness and beauty; the pleasure that we get from being in nature – those things that touch us all deeply. We may never, ever vote Conservative – or Labour: that is just not who we are! We are deeply religious, or we are agnostic! It probably won’t change. These ‘gut’ feelings don’t often change: they help to form something of our identity. Sometimes we have had a crisis, or a near-death experience, or something – and that is when some of these feelings do change. This level is where we can feel our common humanity; and our connectedness to all things. These deep feelings go to confirm our identity, and, from here, we can also begin to feel something of our spirituality. Spend a couple of minutes at this level, just contacting these deeper feelings. You can come back here, anytime. However, you can’t short-cut the process and omit the second part, the conflictual bit. People try to do this all the time, by joining a political party, or by following a sect, or getting a guru, or by joining a movement. Only by going *through* these emotional conflicts, can we really make sense of these things, and retain a sense of the deeper understanding.

Third Section

You are not just a body and a set of feelings. There is much more to you than that. Who you are now is who you have become. There were many influences throughout your life; you made decisions along the road, and there could have been different choices, and there were missed opportunities, and so on and so forth. You may have a frustrated musician inside of you, because you had to give up piano at age seven when your family moved house; or there may be dreams of crossing the Gobi Desert on a camel, or of climbing Kilimanjaro. What might have happened (or not happened) if you hadn’t gone to *that* party? This section deals with that part of the whole ‘You’ that is not manifest at this particular point in time. However, I don’t want to be too precise, because otherwise I may indicate something that isn’t there, or you may inhibit or overlook something that is there. You will have to ‘feel’ your way into this section, over time, and through repetition.

- **First Part:** This first part is to do with your dreams and aspirations. You may feel you deserve to be the branch manager, or the section head: you may have fantasies about how you would do ‘this’ or ‘that’; or you might have always wanted a child or another child – the girl that you have always longed for, or the boy to carry your name forward. These thoughts, dreams, hopes, aspirations, are absolutely fine: all of these are possible; they may (or may not) happen; whether they do or not is relatively irrelevant; all of this part is a manifestation of your present potential, of you trying to exert yourself, to move forward, or do something more in your life. This leads you gently forward from the ‘here-and-now’ towards new possibilities. Take a couple of minutes for this part. Dream your Self up a little.

- **Second Part:** This part is a bit more vague, as it is to do with your unrealised potential. You have millions of brain cells that you don’t use very much: what would you be like if you were using them? With a bit of a push in a particular direction, and with some determination and specialist training, you could be (or have been) ... a musician, an astronaut, a university professor, a lawyer, ... whatever! You chose differently, which is fine, and the potential is still there: latent within you. You could tap some of that potential now, if you wanted to. It is like a bank of reserve batteries, waiting for you to use them. Spend a couple of minutes in this part: tapping into this potential.

- **Third Part:** This is the place, or the level, where you can go to contact ‘That’ which is ‘greater’ than yourself: that which is ‘Other’. This is your personal connection to God, the Universe, or where You can be at One with Everything – however you envisage this. There are not good words for this part: it is almost beyond words. But most people can connect with something they can call their Higher Self, or their Guardian Angel, or that part of Them that touches the ‘Other’, or God, or Allah, or whomsoever you pray to: ‘That’ which is greater than your Self. I am sure that you know what I mean. Spend a couple of minutes ‘being’ Here with the ‘Other’.

The whole exercise has taken only about 20 minutes. See if you can find the time to do something like this regularly. 3-4 times a week perhaps, as part of your relaxation time, or as a quiet meditation in your lunch break, or (as I said) on the bus or train to work. As the weeks unfold, your sense of your Self will increase and deepen. And that is what this is all about!

What lies before us and what lies behind us are small matters compared to what lies within us. And when we bring what is within us out into the world, miracles happen.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Further Reading

Eugene T. Gendlin: *Focusing: How to Open Up Your Deeper Feelings and Intuition*. Rider & Co: 2003

Eugene T. Gendlin: *Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams*. Chiron Publications: 1986

Helen G. Brenner: *I Know I'm in There Somewhere: A Woman's Guide to Finding Her Inner Voice and Living a Life of Authenticity*. Gotham Books: 2004

C.K. Germer: *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*. Guilford Press: 2003

Rick Hanson & Richard Mendius: *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love & Wisdom*. New Harbinger Pubs: 2009

Thich Nhat Hahn: *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Rider & Co: 2008

Paul Jones: *How to Live in the Here and Now: A Guide to Accelerated Enlightenment, Unlocking the Power of Mindful Awareness*. O Books: 2009