



## Salvador Moreno-Lopez: The bodily felt sense

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This is part of the Active *Pause* project, edited by Serge Prengel. The following text is a translation of Salvador Moreno's talk (in Spanish) into English. Translated by Charles Herr.

For better or worse, this transcript retains the spontaneous, spoken-language quality of the podcast conversation.

Years ago I discovered, I learned that there existed over there at the University of Chicago a man named Eugene Gendlin, who offered something called Focusing, and for some reason it caught my attention and subsequently I obtained information and I began to learn. The first thing that caught my attention was that this had to do with attending to my bodily existence (my corporality).

Like many people, I learned to give more importance to logic, reason, and to regard with certain mistrust the question of affect, of feelings, and to be sure the body as well. Then when I continued reading these invitations of Gendlin to place attention to my body, to identify a certain type of sensation and even more to allow myself to be guided in my daily life by these sensations,

I found in myself a sort of mixture of interest, mistrust, of invitation, but also of incredulity. Finally I decided to give myself the opportunity to try out, from the point of view of experiencing [of direct experience], whether that which Dr. Gendlin did or didn't make sense in my own life. And there was a first event that opened for me a new vision of the possibilities in my life. On one occasion in which I searched for my passport and I looked for it everywhere that I thought I might have kept it, there came a moment of much frustration because I could not find it, and, suddenly I thought, "well, if placed it somewhere, I must know where it is; then my problem is that I am not able to recall, recover that information which I have. Gendlin says that that information may be in the body because I did it, let me see if that is true." So I paused, I gave myself time to put my attention to my body, at the same time inviting a response to the question, where have I place my passport? I

waited, maybe a minute, and to my surprise the image of drawer of a closet appeared to me that according to this is where my passport was. With great disbelief I got up, because I had already looked two or three times in that place and had not found the passport. I went, opened the drawer and there indeed was the passport. So that obviously was a big surprise for me because, in a directly experienced and concrete way, what Gendlin said I demonstrated to myself, that there is a body knowing, a kind of body awareness by which we can orient our life significantly, so from there I had my first example.

Without a doubt that was for me the beginning of a great, I would say, transformation and revolution because obviously I began to question this which I later read but which I began to question in that moment, that not everything in life is logical and rational, everything is not resolved by thinking, and on another side feelings and a certain type of sensations are also a way that I could orient and live my life; so I began to pay attention to my body. In the course of now of more than 20 years, I believe the main difficulties that I have run into are precisely not to let myself get trapped by this series of beliefs, by this type of culturally very firmly rooted that insist on making me believe that the rational always has priority, sometimes it is the only thing to pay attention to and that one needs to regard with a certain mistrust what may come from the body because from there nothing can come except something chaotic, disordered, bad, contrary to good social coexistence. Therefore, to rouse myself to put into doubt these ideas has been perhaps one the main difficulties but I believe that the effort has been worth it and I believe that the risks have been worth it because day by day I continue expanding this bodily awareness that allows me, in my daily life, to resolve situations much better than I would have been able to do by thought alone.

One area that for me is very clear of how this bodily awareness helps me to resolve situations positively is on trips. Fairly frequently when I have traveled situations have occurred in which suddenly, I would say, I find myself taking an action; for example, asking whether I need to recover my luggage in an airport or not, when the information I had previously seemed very clear that I did not need to do so, that I should not worry, that I would then ask at my final destination. I discover when I ask, and I am even more surprised when they say, "yes, you need to get your luggage in this airport and you don't need to wait until the final destination because it needs to undergo a revision." Once shall we say I recover from my surprise then I ask myself again: from where did that information come? How did it occur to me to ask in just that moment and that I become aware that has such a pertinent and correct result?

I have also witnessed it for example when I have been able to change ways of resolving problems with others. Shall we say when before when there was a difficulty in an interaction with another person I would ask myself what could I say to that person, what could I do differently, what might I say to her in a different way; and according to what I had planned it all out, and said: "next time that I see her I am going to say something different, I am not going to react to what she says to me," but then, when I was with that person, well it happened that I went back to more or less the same way of responding and once again I felt frustrated. Then I said "well, something more is going on here." And I also began to ask myself from my body, then how, then, do I feel in relation to this person? How do I feel when I interact with her? And giving myself the opportunity to describe the sensations that appeared in response to this question, and giving myself the opportunity to express myself, to symbolize in a way that came from the very sensation which that sensation seemed to show me or needed to express. And then to discover how those sensations were changing and that, at the end of a space of 20 minutes, a half hour of giving myself attention, I felt, shall we say, differently in relation to that person.

Later obviously comes the test of reality, truth, in the next encounter with that person. What would happen? For me it was a surprise to find in my next encounter with that person is simply began to talk and interact in a different way, without thinking, without proposing it to myself, we could say that something different came out of me in my way of being with that person y obviously since my interaction with her was very different. Therefore, when before, for example, we ended up fighting or arguing intensely with great ease without finding ways to arrive at agreements, now the conversation was much more flowing, more understanding and we were able to find ways to identify where we agreed and where we disagreed, and from there see what agreements we could come, to given as it were where we coincided and where we disagreed as well. For me this was a perspective once again definitely very, very wide truth, to recognize how, when I place attention, when I make that pause, when I allow myself to listen to myself from my body I discover that I can transform my ways of relating, of communicating, with a person. This is another of the great discoveries and benefits which I have found in this matter of attention to my body, greatly inspired by the perspective of the philosophy of the implicit of Eugene Gendlin and of Focusing.

Something else that I can say as well is that I really enjoy writing, and I believe that during many years in my life I have written, and I remember that at first, when I began to write some assignments in school, and that since the university or a little earlier, the usual prompts were to write down the ideas I wanted to express, that I made cards with the citations I wanted to use, and I made a kind of index of the themes to be developed. And at first I tried to follow those indications but soon I realized that I couldn't write like that, that if I tried to write following a pre-established scheme ideas wouldn't come; it would seem as though I had nothing to say. Once I think some friend said to me, "and why don't you write as though you were going to write a letter. Imagine that you are write to someone in particular and that you are going to write him a letter." I found that proposal interesting and later, when I was learning to listen to myself as well from the body, I joined the two questions: How would it be if now I do it as though I were going to write a letter to someone yet allowing myself to express myself from what may come in my body? And then in a first instance I will write whatever comes, I won't censure anything, I won't worry about syntax, punctuation, or anything like that, I am simply going to let it flow and that whatever comes from what I am feeling stays written. I have found the way of writing very, very beneficial because often already from the first draft may I say I re-read and say, "Look, it isn't that bad!" or, it's good, now it needs a little polishing, a matter of editing to remove perhaps some expressions as though one were talking to a friend especially if it a more academic text where it is necessary to make that sort of adjustment but the central point was already there.

Then again that too began to intrigue me to ask myself with respect to creativity, how curious it is that doing it in this manner ideas then come to me and I am able to express in a way that later is surprising even to me, as though I said, "I would not have thought that I had that to say," or that I could say it in that way. So once when I had the opportunity to converse with an acquaintance who was a mathematical investigator in a very prestigious university in Mexico, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, it occurred to me to ask him, look, I don't know what you do as an investigator in mathematics but I would like to ask you if you could describe, what happens to you, what is the process when you feel that you are truly creative doing an investigation in mathematics? and the great surprise for me was when he began to describe that something happens in his body, which he puts attention to and from there important ideas for his investigation began to emerge. And I was more surprised because that person did not know anything about Focusing and had not read of the writing of Gendlin, never the less his own experience as an investigator he identified that

in those moments of creativity he was engaged in a process by similar to the one described in Focusing, for example.

This helped me to clarify various aspects in relation to the approach of Gendlin. One, to continue to confirm that we are speaking of a natural process, that we are speaking of a human process within reach of everyone, that it is not a matter someone can do it or not, that the difficulty lies rather in the obstacles that he have learned to put throughout our life experiences to disengage from this process, not to pay attention to it, not to heed it; if we remain stuck in logic, in thought, in the purely rational and we never allow ourselves the opportunity to attend to ourselves from the body then clearly we will not notice that this occurs, right? Nevertheless, and I found it interesting that it was an investigator in this stage of his creativity in which he could also identify this modality recognized so clearly.

Then I said, "Well, then, what these works of Dr. Gendlin give me are clearer elements to know how to do it, to know how to remove these difficulties, how to remove these obstacles and how I can continue to get more benefit from this corporal awareness that is present in my daily life and that permits me to orient my actions in a very effective way, constructive and even creative. Once I began to convince myself of the benefits of putting attention on my body from a certain type of sensation and to let myself be oriented by the responses that came from there, well it also seemed important to me to share these learnings with others.

Taking advantage a little of my professional activities, one experience that has also had great value and impact for me was to create a group coordinated or formed in collaboration with some students of psychology and we offered it to people who had some sort of difficulty that they identified in their living and we then identified a group of women who had in common that they had at home a son or a daughter with special needs. Some had a children with Down syndrome, or some degree of autistic disorder, and then these women felt very tense, very overwhelmed, very tired, from all that they had to attend to in their family; some even suffered from various physical troubles such as headaches, backaches, hypertension, gastritis, difficulty sleeping and as a matter of fact they also identified a series of interpersonal problems in their relationships with their children, with their spouse, their partner, and other family members, because they felt at times so tired that they had little tolerance for many situations, and they got angry easily. We made this group with the purpose that they would be able to put attention to themselves from their own body. And we began with two questions: How to promote inner silence? And How to learn to pause? Inner silence had to do with learning to quiet those inner dialogues and thoughts that many people have 24 hours a day and that do not allow them to be in peace, that generate a lot of tension, sense of being overwhelmed and tiredness, and besides, since often these thoughts have to do with worries and with problems, they generate anxiety, generate stress, generate wear and tear [attrition].

Consequently, when we began to introduce some activities such as that of "clearing a space," in which they could learn not to carry on their shoulders or in their body all the worries 24 hours a day, then we said to them: "Imagine that you have a little wagon with wheels there next to you, and that you are going to leave that in little wagon with wheels all your problems and worries. There they are, they are not going anywhere, then when you have time and are in a condition to resolve or attend to any of those pending matters well you go to the wagon, you take it out and you attend to it; meanwhile, it makes no sense to be carrying it." It was very interesting how already from those activities some people began to feel relieved, began to feel more relaxed, began to feel that their

burden diminished; later we discussed how given their way of life there were so many things to do that they were always running.

And then we availed ourselves of the popular saying “Go slowly, I am in a hurry.” We do not need to feel pressured; we don’t need to race with pressure because we have a lot to do, on the contrary! Although it may sound paradoxical, we can take the time to pause, a pause to attend to our body, a pause to attend to our breathing and come out of the pressure and the automatic rushing that we get into throughout the day. So equally, paradoxically, even though we pause for 5 minutes to calm down, to attend to ourselves, to observe our breathing, what followed had a better result because they found themselves in better spirits to do what they needed to do whereas at first their worry was how could they dedicate 5 minutes to do these activities when they didn’t have enough time, so they began to discover that, doing these activities, time was much more fruitful than if they didn’t do them.

Over the course of 10 weeks, they learned to place their attention on their body, to recognize sensations that had meaning, to express themselves from there, and they began to discover concrete ways to apply it in their daily life; for example some said, “now that I am managing, instead of allowing myself to get trapped in desperation, what I do is I begin to place attention on my body and on I put attention on my breath, and then in that way the trajectory does not become long, it doesn’t burden me, I don’t get angry; in the end the trajectory will take as long whether I go annoyed or I go relaxed. So then I benefit more going relaxed than going angry.

Someone began to say as well how she noticed that the frequency of her headaches had surprisingly decreased, because she had already tried even with a variety of treatments and medications for headache, without much success, and now she began to notice that she had headaches less frequently. And one of the changes that caught my attention, perhaps because of the same sense one has, is when one of these ladies arrived one day and said: “I finally succeeded, I gave myself 15 minutes for myself, to be all alone by myself and gave myself a massage and put my feet in hot water and I enjoyed it a lot! And, would you believe it?, that nothing disagreeable happened in my family; when I thought that if I absented myself, terrible things were going to happen in my family, but no, there were my children, there was my husband, they were just fine and I only said to them: I am going to close my door for 15 minutes, I am going to put my feet in a basin of nice hot water and I am going to give myself a massage and “don’t bother me!” And I discovered that I could give myself those 15 minutes for myself and I feel very good and I really enjoyed it and now I have learned the nothing disagreeable happens if I absent myself, so that now I have told them that once a week, at least, I am going to give myself 15 minutes for myself, to be as I wish or to give myself a little massage of the feet.

This might seem like a very simple thing, nevertheless within the dynamic of the life that these persons live for her it was truly a great accomplishment to have discovered that she had this possibility of giving herself 15 minutes to enjoy and to rest and that it would not create any harm to anyone in the family. Then to really find that these changes in ways of interacting in large part were supported by their participation in these weekly meetings where what we did was precisely to give ourselves time to place attention on our body, to learn to express ourselves from the body, to come into harmony with ourselves, to accept ourselves, to accept with judging what we feel, not to want to explain everything rapidly and then to go discovering how these changes in different attitude began to introduce changes as well into ways of interacting and in ways of relating differently in daily life, with much more well-being.

These experiences also of working with this group of women obviously one of the first recognized difficulties for them was “we don’t have time to do more activities.” So that the activities that we began to propose to them the took 5 minutes or 15 minutes “We don’t have time!” So one day I put to them: “Okay! Given all that we have talked about, all that you have learned and discovered, would there be some activities that you do in your daily life that you could do differently, with this different attitude, but that would not take additional time?” and one lady thought and said, “yes, when I was the dishes!” When you wash the dishes, how could you wash the dishes in a different way? – “well by noticing what I am feeling in my body as I am washing the dishes.” Look how interesting, I said. And what more could you do?- Well I could also pay attention to the water, to the dishes, to the movement. Well I find what you are proposing very interesting, how would it be to put it into practice to see what you discover from experience. The other women also found it interesting to try how when washing dishes, an activity that they had to do anyway, they could be attending to their body, attention on their hands, on the movements, to the contact of the water with their hands, with the soap.

The next week I was completely curious to know what these women had found when they undertook this activity; and freshly, the surprises that these activities give. They were very happy with what they found! “One thing was very important for me,” said one of them, “is that I felt very peaceful and very calm, and before the truth is that for to wash the dishes was an annoying activity, that I always fought with my children and my husband to help with and nobody wanted to help and then I felt frankly bothered and frustrated that it fell to me to wash the dishes, and now I found that doing it this way, this activity can produce in me a sensation of calmness, peacefulness, and that instead of being a chore I can enjoy it.”

I say well there is a big change there truly in the attitude, in the results of how doing it in a different way, attending from the body, this daily activity as an example can have a very different sensation or meaning in our life, that instead of wearing us out it generates this possibility of sensing tranquility, calm, peace, and also it means that we are not always thinking. It is, like a ...I would say, it is like an additional benefit, and then this makes that in other moments I am not necessarily thinking, I can be without thinking and this permits me to be more attentive to what I am doing, I turn off the fountain of wear and tear that comes from these worried thoughts and on the other hand I place myself in conditions of more full, complete attention to do what I am doing, I decrease the risk of making mistakes and I increase the probability that what I do will be done better and with less effort. I say, well this is wonderful, because truly in a relatively simple manner I can proceed to open these new dimensions of well-being in my daily life, and that seems very important to me as well to empathize is that this is something within reach for everyone.

I believe that the only thing that is necessary is to have an interest in learning and to give ourselves this opportunity to discover and try whether it really true or not. Sometimes, when I give some workshops, I tend to say to people: “I share with you my experience, I tell you that this is valuable for me; I have seen it happen many times in me and in other people, but what I want with this is only to invite you to give yourself the opportunity to try it because what will really convince you is what you find from your own experience, when you can experience the changes from making these pauses, from placing attention from the body, from letting yourself be oriented by your bodily awareness, then this is what is going to convince you of the value and benefit that this can have for

you; what I tell you, as I mentioned to you, I hope will serve as an invitation to you to inspire you to do it.

One area in which to also place attention to the body, listen to myself from the body, which also I have also found very interesting and beneficial I would say is the field of physical and emotional health that day by day seems to me to be something integrated and joined and that this separation that is made so frequently of the emotional on one side and the physical on the other is truly something completely artificial because in fact we form a singular unity. Consequently, it is as though without denying that some corporal ailments that we feel can have factors of a physiological nature, in the nature of a lesion, or in the nature of an infectious agent that comes to provoke them, I also find it important to ask ourselves about the personal & emotional sense that our states of health have. And then for example an affliction in the throat apart from fungi, bacteria that could be there, we can also ask, in addition to that, what else is in play with regard to my way of living or worries that have in my life now? What is my throat telling me with these ailments? And lately what I have been doing also with people in this direction has been surprising us with the diversity of personal experiences that are appearing when we pay attention to a diversity, we would say, of body symptoms or body aches. So that without negating that other factors may be in play that contribute to these ailments, we can indeed come closer as well to listening to what these symptoms and ailments may be telling us and then we can discover that there are some situations of interaction, of ways of living that need attending to and that need to be transformed to really live in a healthy way.

I believe that now it is already a little more common, more acceptable to say that there are illnesses that have an very important emotional component, that there are emotional elements that have a part in generating some illnesses, and body awareness and the approach that we can take from this experiential perspective offer us as it were very concrete alternatives of how to attend to these ailments, how to discover their significance and how to propitiate the transformations in our daily life that we need to be healthy.

Recently, I was working with a person who had a very specific difficulty with swallowing water. At first she could only do it drinking with a straw and then she began to come close to a bottle but she almost had to leave very little water in her mouth and then wait a while until finally she could let the water go down. She had already consulted with various doctors, she had already taken different types of medication that they had given her and when we began to attend to her with the question "and what is it that your throat is trying to say?" a process began in which this person started to recover various very intense emotional experiences speaking in her life from, say, the last 20 years. And to the extent that she has been able to speak and express all that she had not been able to say, or express in relation to these intense experiences, she has gradually been able to drink water more fluidly, such that on one occasion when we were in conversation, she had a small bottle of water and I was observing her with certain curiosity to see how, how she was going to drink the water, if she would do it in small sips and suddenly I was surprised because she grabbed the little bottle and drank it with great fluidity, as though she did not have any bother in her throat. I did not comment, I only observed her and then some time later she turned and said: "listen, I think I just drank the water in one gulp, right? I think that now I don't need to pause." I said: I think that is so, I think that there is now a big difference in how you are able to drink water. I had not noticed, she said, but I really enjoy it.

And for me it is also another example of this variety of opportunities and possibilities of improving our daily life by pausing, placing attention to our body, recognize a certain type of sensations and to learn to express ourselves with precision from them. So that for that reason this matter of putting attention to my own corporality, to the corporality of others, becomes truly something important and valuable in my life in these last years and something that I really enjoy sharing with whomever has an interest in learning and discovering how to do it because I am more than convinced of the great benefits that this offers us and that it is something that is available to everyone.

Translated by Charles Herr

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