

Akira Ikemi, PhD. Is professor of psychotherapy at Kansai University. He studied with Prof. Gendlin at the University of Chicago graduate school. He is one of the founders of the Japan Focusing Association and former board member and ILC of TIFI.

He is going to tell us about Popularity of Focusing in Japan.

- First of all, please tell me about the Focusing population in Japan

There are currently 148 Certified Focusing Professionals listed in the TIFI website (Dec 2018). This is a large number, the Japanese have a significant representation in TIFI, along with 146 from Israel and 145 from Canada. There is also a Japan Focusing Association which has a membership of something like 600 people. These are people who enjoy Focusing in their lives, who are not interested in becoming professionals in Focusing.

- According to the article written by Mieko Osawa (Osawa, 2017), Focusing was introduced to Japan in the 60s. Can you say something about the development of Focusing in Japan?

As I wrote in a book chapter in *The Person-Centered Approach in Japan* (Ikemi, 2015), one of the characteristics of Focusing in Japan is that the first people who brought Focusing to Japan were university professors. In fact, the first book on Focusing to be published in Japan was a translation of a collection of Professor Gendlin's articles translated by Professor Takao Murase, and published in 1966. That's 13 years before the book *Focusing* came out in the USA!

Graduate students, who studied with these professors back then, are now the current generation of professors. And they have carried forward their studies on Focusing, and now a still younger generations of scholars are emerging. Focusing in Japan is rooted firmly in the universities, and there is mention of Focusing in most major textbooks on clinical psychology or psychotherapy. Being studied in the universities, Focusing has become self-propelled.

Another background for such early interest in Focusing, is the proliferation of Industrial Counselors (JAICO), mostly non-professional counselors working in corporations supporting junior workers and enhancing mental health in the workplace in general. JAICO who have been active since the 1960's studied Carl Rogers. When Japanese scholars went to visit Rogers, they met Gendlin and developed an interest in what Gendlin had to say. So Gendlin's works got translated and there was already a population who was receptive to read his works in the 1960s, from before the book *Focusing* was ever published.

- Why is it that not many people know how popular Focusing is in Japan?

Many people who engage in Focusing in Japan, make a living with something else. The academics are paid from the universities, there are school teachers who use Focusing, and they are paid by the schools, there are nurses and physicians who are paid by the hospitals and so forth. So very few people put Focusing *on the market*,

so to speak. So, it would look as if there is not so much Focusing activity going on, as compared to the USA. Rather, there is something like a quiet congregation sharing new ideas in Focusing within the Japanese Focusing communities.

- I completely understand that! When I received your session first time, it was an eye opener for me. And Focusing Workshops in Japan really inspire me. Perhaps there may be something about the cultural dimension of Japan or Japanese that goes well with Focusing?

As I wrote in that book (Ikemi, 2015), it seems to me that that the Japanese language carries with it, something like Focusing. "Hara ga tatsu" is often translated as "anger", but a literal translation would be, "the gut is becoming apparent from lower to higher." When you are in some situation, you suddenly notice a felt sense forming in the lower abdomen and rising up --- a modern day interpretation of this is "anger" as most people understand it today. But I think it is a phenomenological description of a felt sense.

Also, "Mune ni Te wo Atete Kiite Goran", which means "put your hands on your chest and listen inside". The real things are not what one says with the mouth but resides in the chest, so one needs to listen to the chest.

There are many of these expressions, but if I may talk about one more, it would be "Aite no Mi ni Naru" --- to become the other person's body---. To understand the other, one needs to become the other's body. This is really Focusing! In English, which is much more rational than Japanese, you cannot say this, become you literally cannot become the other's body. So, in English it would be, put your feet in another's shoes. But it's the not the feet! It's the whole body's feel!

Of course, Japanese is very much more relational than English. There are how many ways of saying I? Five? Depending on who the other is, the first-person pronoun changes. In English I am always I, whether I am speaking to the Queen of England or to a kindergarten kid. But in Japanese, I am always in relation to you, and also the body (身) is relational to the other.

In Gendlin's philosophy, this is the concept of "interaction first". That contents, such as I or you, are generated from the relationship, or from the process.

And much of the Japanese language is understood with *felt meaning*. There is no singular and plural, you know.

- Like the famous haiku: Kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto? (Ancient pond, frog jumps in, the sound of water).

Yes! I wrote an article about that in English (Ikemi, 2013). We don't know how many ponds there are, how many frogs there are and how many sounds we heard. But most Japanese visualize only one frog in one ancient pond. There is a felt meaning of stillness that comes across. The stillness is disturbed by a frog that dives into the pond and then stillness prevails again. The haiku sings of silence!

So, I think the Japanese language carries something of Focusing in it. Although most Japanese don't pay attention to this, and may have lost it, there is still a receptivity to what Focusing is conveying.

- The First Asia Focusing International Conference held in Kobe last year was hugely successful, with approximately 300 participants from Japan, China, Korea and other countries. Do you think "language" is playing a big part of the Focusing popularity in Asia?

I don't know other Asian Languages, but I assume there is some similarity with what I just said about Japanese. I know that there is no subject in a Chinese sentence as in Japanese, and also no singular/plural distinction too. So perhaps Asians have some kind of attunement to Focusing.

- I totally agree with it! I feel there is something about Focusing and Japanese Language. Thank you for your time today.

References

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