

## **What is the difference between an ‘emotion’ and a ‘felt sense’ and why do we need both?**



An emotion is a feeling like sadness, anger, shame or joy. “It is often sharp and clearly felt and often comes with a handy label by which you can describe it for example, fear, anger” (Gendlin, 1978 p. 40). A felt sense however, “is larger, and more complicated, than an emotion. It is almost always unclear, at least until you focus on it, and almost never comes with a convenient label” (Gendlin 1978, p.40).

A felt sense integrates mind, body and spirit. It occurs at “the border between the conscious and unconscious” (Gendlin 1979 p 2). It is more than a feeling or emotion: it carries with it the whole of experience, what the feeling is connected to, its history and connections. Initially, a felt sense seems vague, unclear and almost blurry before it comes into ‘focus’. It takes time to sense and to form. It opens and offers more, in steps – what it is about, its essence and what it needs. It can offer a felt vision of what it would be like to be healed. “It is a doorway and connects one to their innate wisdom” (Rappaport, 2009, p 33). “A ‘felt sense’ is not the same as an emotion, although it can contain emotions”. Emotions and felt senses both come of themselves, in a bodily way and each has meaning in our lives. We cannot find a felt sense by turning away from our emotions. If we have an emotion, we can let the wider felt sense form around the whole unique intricacy of the situation or problem (Weiser Cornell 2013 p 48-50).

When we do this, the body finds its own way and provides answers (the felt shift). Emotions may emerge along with thoughts, perceptions, memories, images, words and metaphors. A more holistic sense of the problem unfolds. (Gendlin, 1996, pp 57-63; Gendlin 1991, pp 259-279; Gendlin 1978, p 41 and 116).

“We can see the difference when people move from a feeling to the felt sense. The feeling is made from (and understandable from) the known, formed story detail. But in the ‘felt sense’ the implicit situation is a much larger whole” (Gendlin 1984).

Internally referring happens. Therefore, ‘felt senses’ occur and can be encouraged. Looking at the whole can be helpful for the client.