



Meditate & Mediate

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Thomas: Welcome, everybody, in the New Year. So, from my side, Happy New Year to everybody and lots of blessings so that our intentions and our development will unfold beautifully and in alignment with our inner core.

After he led the session last time and in a beautiful way, I think he introduced many, many principles of his work and, again, shared a lot of his life experience which is very beautiful and rich. I want to, maybe, recap a little bit William's session and the sessions before. I think some of the content that we looked at so far, that I will return to, was, of course, like we talked a lot about the intrapersonal or my interior development and what are the prerequisites that I need to bring or at least be interested in developing in order to be a participant in negotiations, a participant that can also perform some of what William suggests. I think he introduced what is win-win and what is win-win-win.

I liked, also, when I heard the session, that he talked about the silent revolution around the planet, how decisions are being made more and more in negotiations, so that negotiations is actually a constant process in our lives. Also within ourselves, in a way, we could say we are negotiating our way in life with ourselves, closer and closer to the core of who we are. I think, many many outer circumstances show us how to realign with the core in ourselves so that we are more and more resting in a place of feeling life.

I think, another important principle that he introduced and he talked a lot about is the BATNA, like your best alternative in decisions, how we ground ourselves in negotiations. I think one thing that he left open, and this is for William for next time, that also what is the healthy no. He wanted to share a little bit more about the healthy no in negotiation.

Infusing Space into a Situation by Going to the Balcony

And then he said something... and I think this is where I... that he said already multiple times, that I want to start with today, he said how important it is to put yourselves in somebody else's shoes. So let's start with that.

And there were many questions. I mean, last time I looked at the questions, and there were so many questions that you sent in, and there were some that I thought, oh, let's use this session to address some of them that are very powerful and, I think, very important for all of us to look at and that we might experience in life, all of us.

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When we say, “Going to the balcony,” or we are saying, “Put yourself in someone else’s shoes,” I think just those two, in my understanding, are like results of a very high human development. Maybe, I want to reconfirm that to apply those principles in our daily life will confront many of us with a deep learning process because, on the one hand, it sounds easy to say, “Okay, let’s go to the balcony.” Let’s take a break, let’s go for a walk, let’s have a meditation—but to really, as William described in his own experience, to be able to be in a non-disassociated way on the balcony within a situation that is confrontational, that is kind of within a conflict situation, that is difficult to experience, needs a high level of inner development. I think, we might see—and I saw this, also, within the questions—and I want to reconfirm that it’s a path, it’s a human development path, that it’s not something that we immediately, “Oh, now it’s great to go to the balcony.” If it was that easy, many of us would do it in daily situations very often, but the fact is that, especially in conflicted situations, we have a conflict because we are not able to go to the balcony.

I would love to use this session to shine a bit more of a light onto the difficulty—because once we are already on the balcony, that’s already a big step, but what happens before? What is with all the conflicts before when we are not able to go to the balcony? And why aren’t we able to go to the balcony? I think, one of the symptoms that we might encounter, also, in ourselves is that we might think of development as something that should go fast, and many of us would like to be, maybe, further down the road than we are. I think it’s very important to see that that’s already a symptom of the very thing that we are looking at. Not being able to be here is already a symptom of avoiding part of what’s happening here. Otherwise we would be very relaxed in this moment and we would relate to everything that happens in our life online, as it’s happening.

When we take the mystical traditions or the wisdom traditions around the world, there is, often we hear a word that's called 'karma'—and I talked a little bit about this already but I want to bring this back into a deeper exploration. The word 'karma' sounds like an innocent word. We might know what it means or we might not really know what it means, but it is a word that holds a lot of information. So we could say karma is, as we said already in the beginning of the course, like a carry-on luggage, that going to the balcony might mean at the beginning that we really need a break and we need to, maybe, go for a walk, but what do we do? We try to process what is hard to process in the given situation. We take it out of that situation. We go to meditate. We go to contemplate. We go for a walk. We cool down the emotional intensity, maybe, until we, what we say, reconnect back to our core. But why did I leave my core? When I need to reconnect to myself or when I feel that I got tight and I'm holding or I closed my heart, I closed my energy, I protected myself, basically I need some time to dearmor and to come back to myself, to reconnect, otherwise I end up either in a shut down or I end up in a very strong cognitive attempt to solve the situation.

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But karma means that we postpone experience, and that's a very important function of our nervous system, but it's a function of our nervous system that, I believe, has grown as disassociation or as a whole trauma response that happens in our nervous system when we experience overwhelming situations for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. There is a long long history of, I believe, our nervous systems developing a trauma response, a function that helps us to deal with overwhelming situations and I believe those functions—and we will explore this a bit deeper today and see that how that relates to our life—those functions are very intelligent. When today I'm ending up in a situation where I ask the question, "So how should I deal with this?" I know one thing: that I don't *feel* any more how to deal with this—but that's very important. When I ask, "How should I?" I know that I'm disconnected. I cannot feel life anymore. It's like life is like a river and we are swimming in the river. As long as we swim in the river, we are getting wet because we feel water, we feel the intelligence of life and we are swimming in the water. Once I swim—and as it seems, now there's a very cold period in some parts of the world—so we are actually suddenly walking on the iced-over stream. It's like from swimming in the water, we suddenly walk on ice.

If I try to figure out how to deal with something because I lost the relation to the very situation—and losing the relation means that in some parts of me, that given situation hits a pre-formed space or place where I decided already much earlier to disconnect. I think that's a very important part as well, the capacity to be on the balcony, the capacity to have—what does it mean to have inner space? And inner space grows, I believe, through multiple dimensions or kind of tools or trainings. One is that if I'm completely identified with myself, when I'm reactive, I'm just reactive. If I learn to cultivate presence, like through mindfulness, as we said, we introduced already, like the mindfulness and presence and stillness practice, this is something that allows me to participate more and more in space. If I to go the balcony, I infuse space into a situation that became very dense—but what does it mean, it became dense? It means that I started, most of the time unconsciously, to shut down a part of my experience or that the world triggered the part in me that is already shut down, maybe, for decades.

So my past suddenly participates heavily in the current situation. That's where we start to ask, then I step out into a kind of a overly mental process, "How can I deal with the situation?" But in the moment I ask myself that, I know: oh, I lost my connection, my felt connection, and relation to the given situation. Then we usually call that situation 'difficult', but what is actually difficult is my internal process given the outside situation.

That's, I think, where the journey starts that I love to say that, like in the understanding of the wisdom traditions, when I'm not already kind of... when I didn't corrupt my own understanding of human development like we do it in capitalism, that everything should go fast and should be very successful, but that I know that my development is like a good wine, that by really giving it the space and attention, I will deepen and learn because often, out of fear, we are running too fast. So when I'm already disassociated or I need to manage a lot of fear in my system, I want to be already further down the road, but actually I'm here. In the Tao Te Ching, there's a beautiful sentence that says "The journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath our feet. The giant pine tree grows from a tiny sprout." Like in nature, when we let the sprout unfold and we give everything that the plant needs at the given stage. Like for us in our childhood experience, if there is relation, if there is protection, if there's warmth, if there is kind of security and emotional support and kind of a potential-oriented attention that supports us to develop our own voice, so we will grow a base that is warm, that is open, that we get the feeling, oh, life and relation are consistent, coherent, and they are, in a way, a trust relation.

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As you remember in one of the first sessions we talked about the inner world, the outer world, and the bridge. The bridge is my capacity, the capacity of my nervous system to balance both at any given moment. Then we said, in trauma, that in the areas where I'm traumatized, usually I can't perform this properly. I will meet my own inner overwhelm and shutdown, and then I build throughout my life kind of a system around it in order to handle that shutdown, if it hasn't been integrated again.

I would love, on this call, to just encourage us to really honor: when it's difficult, it's not in the way. When we feel, oh, I'm trying this again and again and I feel it's hard, and it's hard for me to resolve certain parts in my life, it's hard for me sometimes to work with clients in mediation and so that's not in the way, that's part of my way, that's the way. That's why we are here—so that the conscious aspects and the unconscious aspects in me are mixed, and there might be moments that are very bright and connected, and others less—that's my journey. All of it, not just, "Once I will be done with this conflict, it's gonna be great," because often it happens that once this is solved or it looks like solved, then the next is coming, the next. So that I see how often do I actually not want to be in a given situation and that's the reason why it's hard to be resolved.

That's why we're saying we have like a transpersonal dimension of development that gives us space and the capacity to reflect or, as it's also in the Jewish tradition, it's named kind of beautiful, 'to become a stranger to yourself'. Like that I can learn to witness certain processes in me, and that's different from disassociating because sometimes disassociation and witnessing, they are very close to each other, they might appear in me very similarly, but the one is disconnected and the other one is deeply connected and has space.

I believe, for the capacities that we are training here and that many of us are training anyway already, often for many many years, is that we infuse kind of a transpersonal space into different layers of our life's embodiment. Because ultimately, when we can rest in a situation, and my body is full of eyes, my emotions are open, my mental capacity's fully present, I'm, as William said last time, a *possibilist*—I am connected inside to the possibility, which means the potential future, the potential upgrade, the potential creative solution of a given situation—but that's a very highly refined capacity, that I'm not going into a situation with a preformed idea but I'm going into the situation as space in which emergence can happen. Suddenly, I have creative ideas, I surprise myself by what I'm saying—that's a highly refined capacity, especially in tighter situations. That's why, on the one hand, it's good to learn a kind of a method, to kind of have tools how to work in situations that are difficult, so I think that's very good, and ultimately the next step, I believe, is to be integrated enough, which means that we have the transpersonal tools and we have the integrative tools so that I get to know the places where I feel tight, and usually that tightness has often little to do with the current situation and a lot to do with my past.

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Actually, that my past and the past of my ancestors and their ancestors is actually participating in this moment when I shut down and I feel suddenly disconnected. That's why presence, in the mystical understanding, is kind of the unification of the past and the future here. It's not this moment *without* the past, it's this moment *including* all the past. That's why it sometimes makes it more complex because then me being very open and being open to feel my emotions and not see them as a difficulty in the situation is that I'm in agreement to really feel what I feel today, and this includes, most probably, that my ancestors are in agreement with what I feel right now. That's a very powerful integration process. That's why I'm saying, the beauty of our journey is not only to get there but the beauty of our journey is to be here, in the current situation that I feel is difficult, and to allow myself to explore what I mean when I say 'difficult'.

Tools and Resources for Effective Conflict Resolution

Then, I think, the next step in the interpersonal relation is that... There was a beautiful question that was very long, that's why I will summarize the question of somebody that oversees a prison project. She has... In one of the volunteers that worked on the team, the impact of listening to trauma was so high that it took this person a long time to really integrate, the person couldn't sleep afterwards and had a high level of anxiety. There was a big need to process or digest the transmission of trauma, or the transference, and maybe their own trauma trigger. I think, because when we work in difficult or conflicted or tense environments, we very often are being exposed to trauma or to the mute trauma that is being transmitted without it being shared—but this doesn't mean that it's not in the room. In many of the crisis situations or conflict areas around the world, there are generations of trauma often sitting in the room, trying to negotiate. That's why when I look just at the two people that are trying to find an agreement, it's one thing, but usually if we were to see the tree, the reverse tree of, maybe, generations of trauma that are trying to negotiate something here in the room, that's like intense past that is often very foggy and hard to look through.

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That's why I think, when William shares about some of the experiences, I believe that really needs a high-level skill of presence and availability to be able to embrace the intensity that is sitting in the room. That's why I thought it's very important to understand, again, that when we work on trauma, what are the tools that we can also, because this course is also about how do I do this work sustainably and with love and with care for many many years? Many of us are working in environments that are often filled with crisis situations and with difficult life circumstances, so we need a very good recharging system and a very good inner kind of hygiene or digestion process in order for us to stay vital and open and happy as we are doing the work that we do.

I believe we said one of the dimensions is the transpersonal development. One of the dimensions is the personal development, and then, why we came together, also, and why William and I had the wish to do this course is also that the we-space is a very very powerful environment and a very powerful environment to heal, to integrate, to negotiate and to develop. This means that either I have enough space to go to the balcony on my own within a situation, which means without karma delay, maybe I need the space and time to really kind of reflect on the situation, to feel into the situation, to find out, to get some insights or ideas, so then there is the balcony in space/time later, and/or I have an environment of support that creates the stabilization and presencing in the given situation or afterwards, which is my community, which is also where we are heading to the third side. That the presence in all of us here on the line right now—and I want to, when we afterwards go into our kind of contemplative or meditative journey, I want to, again, let us presence that the power of hundreds of people being in a mutual container is a very powerful field.

I have seen, in many many retreats and groups and training programs, how powerful it gets when we are all aligned, connected, and present with one another and also with people that speak up in a group, with people that are in intense processes or life circumstances, that the power, the healing and integration power and presencing power of a group is enormous. Why? Because when more and more of us are coherent inside, or more coherent inside, and when we intentionally connect, like here within this course, our intention to explore something that we all seem to have—a calling, a passion, a pull towards—is a very powerful intention. So together we create a mutual group intention, that intention is what brought us together. The drives within us to explore conflict resolution, mediate and meditate, is like we are all somehow connected to it through our intelligence. Otherwise it wouldn't resonate. The fact that we presence something is that we build a community around a certain quality so the networks and neural networks in us cohere. I think that's a very powerful process. Not only the neural networks in our brain but all our central nervous systems—which means that when I listen to you, I listen to you with my whole body. But listening to you with my whole body means also that I listen to you with all the levels of development. I think that's a very powerful tool to create community, that listening is using all the facilities, functions, and abilities of all my development, our development and, of course, on the bigger picture, when we take it to big conflicts, like the world's development. The intensity of connection and group presencing are way higher than any one of us can perform alone, with just a few ingredients of attunement and presencing. I think that's very powerful. I will come back to this during the meditation.

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Cultural Reframing of Our Regulatory Functions

Then I want to speak a bit a cultural reframing, that when today I experience an emotion, for example I'm witnessing conflict or trauma, I'm part of a conflict that I don't know how to resolve, it most probably meets a part in me that had a hard time already before to process the situation, and then I call the situation difficult but actually I'm meeting something in me that was overwhelmed, most probably, already before or I meet the same part in other people and then I just see a reactive response or a reaction to the given situation and we are here in order to create the bigger space to host that reaction.

Now, when I'm very free and I can really listen to you and I'm really present, then that's not the experience that's difficult because then I'm willing to get the trauma transmission, to get the difficulty, the inner conflict, the family conflict, because also many questions came in about what if conflicts happen in my family system with siblings. And of course those are, often, the most difficult conflicts that we experience because they are so close to our conditioning. They are so close that which we can't see alone. That's why we often need a support system. That's part of responsibility. If you remember, at the beginning of the course we said *the ability to respond* is when I am in a natural state of openness, I can receive the world, I can listen to the world, and I'm able to respond. Reaction is when I try to receive the world, it hit some kind of stagnation, overwhelm, trauma of the past, and then I reject the discomfort that I have or I don't even notice it because I'm numb. Then it hits a place in me that is unable to respond, and sometimes I even often don't feel it because if my mind still works, I still try to figure how to deal with it, but actually I'm not anymore fully participating in it.

That's why we might live in a world where we sometimes think that the emotions are the issue why we can't solve certain situations, but actually when it is the overwhelm and the little infusion of presence into my emotional experience that creates sometimes, maybe, the difficulty in the experience. And that's why I think it's very helpful for us as a culture to reframe weaknesses or what we often try to get rid of in ourselves, so when I say, okay, this is a part... Because somebody said, "Okay, how can I stay kind of cool and relaxed when I'm afraid?" And I don't think we are supposed to stay cool and relaxed when we are afraid. I think we will actually need to come more closer to the place that is afraid and find a way how to allow ourselves to be afraid, which sometimes is possible for me in my own internal practice, but sometimes it's not possible, and I need some support with it because I didn't have that support at the beginning of my life in a way that grows that function. So today I might feel this as a weakness or lack of capacity, which is actually the childhood hero, so dealing with the overwhelm of fear by shutting part of myself down, that contraction is intelligent. Now, when I sit in a negotiation or in a conflict and I feel contracted and I don't know what to do, then I try to get rid of, then I see: this is the issue, but actually this protection is the childhood hero of my life, this protection kept me safer than without it.

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I believe, in my own capacity to relate and negotiate with myself, the weaknesses are not weak but actually intelligent, and that I can stay with other people and support them in reconnecting deeper to what they see as dysfunctional in themselves—that's already a very powerful cultural reframing. That what I see as an obstacle in myself is some misunderstood regulation function that kept me safer in the past than without it, so it's intelligent. This sounds, maybe, very simple, but that's often what we negotiate in ourselves, that we try to get away from what is difficult and we say "Oh, if it just wasn't that difficult, I would be much more free." No, because we are here to relate to what we call difficult in ourselves because that's, as we see more and more, not just in ourselves but epigenetics confirms more and more what the wisdom traditions say since a long time that certain elements of trauma and difficulties are being passed on, generation to generation. In a way, the wisdom traditions also tell us that we have the chance to rewrite them. We can rewrite those tendencies by presence, by care, by attention, through attention, through community, through practice, through inner healing and integration, and by deepening our understanding.

Because many times when I sit in a space with somebody, and somebody comes at me with kind of a verbal aggression, and I suddenly feel tense, did I really decide to get tense or does it look like, oh, I got tense, I closed my heart, I feel distant, I feel a bit paralyzed. But in the moment I feel it, it's not that I decided to do that. It seems like it happened to me. Suddenly I'm in a phase in my life that I feel more tense, and maybe two weeks ago I felt very free and open. Something happened, maybe I don't even know anymore what happened, and since then, many things feel more difficult. Some people say, "Oh, I had such a deep meditation already, I practiced and I was very quiet and calm, and since two weeks my mind is racing, and I don't know why. Now I fell back into an earlier stage of my practice." Or other people might say, "I went now for one year, two years, five years to therapy, and I thought I'm already done with it, but now I'm really frustrated because this and that happened in my life, and I got triggered again, and it looks like as if the last five years were for nothing. I didn't do any progress."

And what I'm saying is that that's not true. I mean, maybe sometimes it is true, that the main point, maybe, was missed, but we are not really falling back often. We are developing through layers and layers of tendencies, and once it's back, there's no way to argue with it. Once I feel it's tight in me, it's difficult, I don't know how to solve the situation—this is it. This is it. There's no, "Oh, I would wish it differently." No. This is it. This means I have a true commitment to my inner path and that I see that regulation functions of my past are, maybe, misunderstood today, but they are very beautiful in the essence. There is something intelligent happening, and I believe that it's for us—not only for us here on the call, for us in life—in this time of the development of humanity to reframe those functions as intelligence how life in myself, and maybe already throughout thousands of years, tries to deal with overwhelming and difficult situations. By looking at myself with a positive attention to say "Oh, if I experience this as difficult, what is the beauty in the difficulty?"

What is the beauty? And either I can do this in my own contemplation or kind of exploration, or I do it with other people—that's why we often do triad work—and to find out what is actually the real process underneath what we see on the surface.

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In the mystical traditions, we say there's the surface, that's what I experience in the room, and underneath are the forces that compose what I see in the room. If I just deal with the surface, often I might miss what is the true dynamic that is happening on a much deeper level. But only functions like the balcony or enough inner presence and space that I can dive within a difficult situation and I can dive into the unseen part of the movie, the making of this movie, that's where it's really exciting. I think that starts with this care that, if I developed the defense system, if I developed the system to protect myself, or if I experienced some trauma or overwhelm, either developmentally or through some major impacts, those functions are intelligent. We did it out of intelligence. But this creates a very positive attention. Then it's not something that I need to get rid of, it's something that I want to listen to in myself. It's something that I want to explore, that I want to get closer to. It's something that I want to understand because it's not a dysfunction, it's a function. It's a function that, maybe, needs something, so there's a need behind it.

Understanding Our Own Needs to Feel the Needs of the Other

And that's why I think, as we already mentioned a bit, that when I contemplate within myself what do I need and what is the beauty of needing, then I think, for many of us, when we say "the beauty of needing", we might find out that we meet many older feelings, many people feel ashamed when they need something, many people feel that when I reach out and I need something, maybe I'm not anymore on eye level, I feel more regressive and young. I feel afraid. Many people might say "Oh, when I need something, I don't feel beautiful in needing." And what I say—that's a very important exploration that I find out what I need, because often in conflict situations we are actually dealing with very deep fundamental needs, but they are not being mentioned. They are not in the room. We are up here, but deeper inside there are often very fundamental unmet needs. In the moment we meet them, many situations start to relax.

I believe the beauty of needing that energy exchange is: I give—I give to the world, I give in my work, I give to life and my environment—but I also receive. The clearer I am at what I need in given situations—it starts with simple things that are very physical. What do I need to eat? What does my body need? What do my emotions need? But it's also on a wider radius, and especially in situations when I am by myself in a conflict, that I am able to ask, okay what do I need right now, in this situation? When I find myself arguing and arguing—okay, when I dive deeper, okay, what is the real need right now in me that I'm trying to convey, maybe, in different ways, and that's why they are not being met? So I reconnect. But the need is something that I feel. It's something that is like a flower bouquet. It's like I hold the flower bouquet that gives me a grounding in myself and I'm connected to my needs. That's why I think this exploration about knowing what I need is a training, because then I can more and more clearly communicate what I need, and the clearer my needs are, I understand other people's needs more—if they tell me, but also if they don't tell me.

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Everything that's—and now I'm coming back to what I started with, I see Mathias' shoes that he made in this drawing—to put myself in your shoes can be that I *think* what you might think or what you might feel; or my whole being is open enough to really *feel* what you feel, to feel what you need, to feel what you are saying when you are not saying it, to feel what is the subtext of the text that I hear. Because often what we hear, we put it into Google translate, and then something else is being said, really, than we hear. Many of us know this. But in order to put myself in your shoes without projecting what I think about you, it's a very deep function of the nervous system to receive somebody, but I can receive you only in the places where I'm open, where I resonate with you, where I feel you, then my body feels your body. I can sense tensions, I can sense open places, I can sense the flow in somebody's body, but why? Because the body needs to be open for this. My emotions kind of resonate with emotions. My mental capacity can resonate with another mental capacity, and so on.

To put myself into your shoes means that I allow myself to feel what you feel. Also to receive your needs because I know what my needs are. I'm alive in my needs—I can feel your needs. There's a resonance between two or more central nervous systems in the room that allow us to deeply connect. Then parents feel their children—we all know this, especially also the ones that are parents—when we feel our children, so we feel, we have kind of an intuitive knowing of what's needed right now. But when we don't feel our children, we need to ask, "Okay, how should I do this? How should I do that?" Or if I don't feel my body, I ask "Okay, what is healthy to eat?" And if I feel my body and I'm connected to my body, my body tells me what I need to eat. The same is also in more complex situations, that when I'm grounded in those capacities in myself, I can really put myself into your shoes, which means I don't project what I think and my values and my worldview onto you, but I can be like a white sheet of paper and really receive you. Then I can sense and understand what might be the need, what is the hidden message, what is the unsaid or excluded element in a conflict. Once we include it, the whole system can relax. Because often there are invisible, unseen elements in the room, and as long as we don't include them back into the system, they will keep screaming. The moment we take them back in, something can relax, and we can hear each other deeper.

That's what I liked when I listened to William's talk last time, when somebody asked the question, "Okay, what if there's somebody that doesn't listen to me?" William, in a way, said "Okay, but we infuse listening first, even if the other person doesn't listen to us, because often when somebody feels really heard, the ability to listen grows, in a way, because there's something, a need that needed to be expressed."

I think I want to encourage all of us to really be in the beauty and also in the difficulty of the human journey, but by being in it, to learn to listen to the parts that are already abandoned. That's why we often don't like them in us—because we abandoned them already, and they actually are our childhood heroes, these are regulation functions that helped us to become the ones that we are. Not to prevent it—to become the ones that we are. I think that's a very powerful reframing.

[00:50:00]

Begin Meditation

Before we continue, and then also give more space to the Q&A section of today's call, let's—I know I said a lot—let's take some space now to let this settle in and give some time to see, okay, what resonated in you, what are the parts in you that are being spoken to. Also, so we absorb now the information, and now it's time to digest inner responses or reactions to what has been said and say, okay, I listen to my body, I listen to my breath, and I turn my awareness inside. I take the listening and I just listen to the sensations that are present right now in me. The different sensations, body sensations, like streaming movements in my body, like the movement of my breath, my body awareness, like my felt sense of my body, also tense places, maybe painful places in my body, to get a... more and more, through the inner practice, my whole body, my nervous system, my emotions, my thoughts become a tool, like an inner mapping.

You're breathing, and every exhale takes me deeper, and then with exhaling I create space inside, like life exhales and digests, like after a meal we sometimes want to rest and let the meal be digested. Like in life when we, with many experiences and the correlation between activity and relaxation and digestion is very important. Like when we hear the question, trauma has a transmission, and then I cannot sleep and I am very busy and triggered inside, I need time to digest. All my nervous system tells me I need time to digest.

Sometimes it seems that I don't know, one way is to say, "Okay, I take space." I let myself drop in and digest the situation.

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You can also have a look how is the correlation in your life between activity doing, participating and space, relaxation, reflection, digestion.

Or right now on this call, we absorbed many things, we listened to things, topics, content, and now we let it settle. Feel it, see how it relates to me, if it relates to me, if there are inner resonances.

Also, how I look at my own aspects of myself that I find less functional, maybe dysfunctional, see as a weakness, maybe as a problem or part that I want to get rid of. Maybe there's immediately something that I can think of, or maybe if it's just revisit my last days, are there aspects in me that I would wish to be very different or that I see as a weakness?

Then, maybe we can, together, just apply practically already what we heard before, so what is it if I reframe that part from it being dysfunctional, difficult, or a weakness, or a problem that I see in myself, I change the focus and I say: I listen to this part in me as an intelligent function that I don't understand yet. A function that I can listen to as if it was an intelligent interesting book, song, painting, an intelligent poetry of life. Life wanted to do the right thing and it did the right thing at a certain time in my life. Whenever that part came online, it was an intelligent attempt to deal with a certain situation.

[01:00:00]

And I keep listening, presence, and I can also, maybe, feel what happened in me, if I feel still connected to my body, if I feel connected to what I feel, if I'm mentally still present.

To listen with curiosity, to find intelligent aspect in that certain part.

So if I transform my approach from it being dysfunctional to it being intelligent, a dysfunction or a problem I want to get rid of—or an intelligent function I want to get closer to, I see as an intelligent function of my intelligence.

That every contraction, every disassociation, every trauma response, every over-rationalization, every defense has an intelligent root that was very important at a certain time of my life.

Then again, to see how do I feel in my body right now, emotionally, mentally?

From this inner part in me also making the relation back to situations in my life where I feel or where I might misunderstand similar functions in other people, that there are functions that are not being heard or understood that create interpersonal dynamics, or I'm not able to put myself into your shoes, where I also separate myself from understanding those functions in you, or taking it personally, or becoming reactive to.

[01:05:00]

So, disowning those functions in me will most probably mean that I don't like them in you or I don't understand them in you.

Then, at the end of our meditation, let's, for a few moments, include, again, everybody online right now, that in the present moment, all around the world, we're sitting and joining our mutual intention and we're creating a field. Even, from the one hand, my mind says we are all separate in different locations, but actually deeper down I can at least experiment with setting the intention that I can feel, I can attune to a virtual sangha, a virtual community, a virtual group of interest.

My nervous system is far more refined and capable than, maybe, I sometimes use in daily life. There's a group presence, a group field, so I set an inner intention that I want feel into hundreds of people creating a field.

Then, slowly, let go, again, of the intention, the group field, and slowly come back to your body, to your feet on the ground or your body sitting on the chair or sofa, or anywhere else. Take a couple of deeper breaths and come back.

[01:10:00]

End of Meditation

I think we went through a very important exploration that, of course, is way more complex in its depth, but it's a step to learn to understand inner processes, defenses, contractions, emotional over-regulations as very intelligent functions in myself, which increases way more the way how I look at my own internal process, the way I want to be with myself, and the way my self-compassion grows, like the ability to really presence my inner process, which is a very very important tool in finding clarity, in decision making, in relation, because not only do I get to know myself deeper on multiple levels, but I also, my nervous system learns more about inner illumination and inner clarity. So I gain clarity and I gain the capability to gain clarity, which means I can apply it more often and with less and less time delay, so maybe at the beginning I run into a situation and feel contracted, and then it takes me a little bit of time to digest it, to open up again.

But maybe the more I learn, the more I can do my inner clarification work while I speak to somebody, while I'm in a conversation, I see, "Oh, I'm getting triggered." I can presence my trigger and I can digest my own trigger in the given moment, which means that I digest part of my past—because often we find out that many of the feelings and many of the inner processes we have is actually an undigested past. That's why often we need to infuse space—because we need to increase our capability to digest.

Integrating the past means digesting the past. Integrating a trauma means digesting an overwhelming situation, period of our life or whatever, aspect of our life. We're digesting what happened in the past—in the current moment. Our capacity is growing to do that, and that's what we call a process awareness, a growing process awareness. Because I'm a process right now, you're a process right now, and relation is that we both learn more and more to regulate ourselves within relation. I don't need to leave the relation in order to regulate myself, I learn to regulate myself within the relation until relation is bigger than the content—which doesn't mean that we always say yes or no, it doesn't say anything about the content, it says something about the capacity to be related. Then I'm saying yes and no not because I have to leave. Because I can stay, I can decide for yes and no. That's emotional maturity. I can experience the intensity of emotion within a certain situation and I can find the response, moment to moment to moment, within the given situation. I think that's a wonderful capacity that grows, and so that relational capability is what we see when William speaks about his experiences. There's a high level of skill to be related and to allow an inner emergence. The beauty of it is that in those situations there's still enough inner space for creativity.

[01:15:00]

And that's why I often say, also, in our groups and retreats, when there is a surprise by what we say—because it's fresh, it meets the moment, I didn't plan it, it wasn't a preformed idea, but it was something that surprises me when I speak—so that means something fresh happens, and I think that's a very important function in the conflict resolution process, or in my own, because usually we apply old tools and then we get stuck again and again. And then there's a possibility for a new understanding or idea or creative intervention that I didn't try before, and that's why something changes. The capacity to be in the inner digestion also allows us, through the space, to bring in new information, surprising information, spontaneous information, and spontaneous creativity that often changes the course of things.

Q&A: Not Feeling Is an Intelligent Function of Our Nervous System

Host: So we'll get started with a written in question from a participant, and she is asking, "How do I receive someone else without losing myself?" A few minutes later she submitted another statement about being afraid to lose herself.

Thomas: Yeah, a good question is: what the process of losing myself? Usually when we say we lose ourselves, what it means is that we stop feeling ourselves. So when I stop feeling myself—it's exactly what we said before—I meet the function that was very important, obviously, in my past. So when I lose myself, that's a very important moment because it means that I meet a place in myself where disassociation or numbing out was a very intelligent function. Disassociation for many children is a super important function that helped them to become who they are today. Without it, we would not be able to develop certain capacities or capabilities. That when we are grown up, we try to get rid of these places, so when I numb out or when I disassociate or when I get blank or I don't know what to say, or I become reactive, then I might usually think of it as a problem—but in the inner work, we are going to say, "Okay, let's see that not feeling is more important than feeling." Numbing out is obviously more important than, for example, feeling scared. When I get numb, I honor in myself the fact that I numb out.

And if I have enough resources in me so I can do this in my own inner work, so when something like that happened, and I afterwards have a moment of time, I go in and I see, okay, what I do feel? I check my body, I check my emotions, and I see, okay, what's my body awareness? It's hard for me to feel my body. What's my emotional... can I say what's my emotion right now? And often I will find: no. Because we also hear it often when ask we people, "Okay, how do you feel? What's happening for you emotionally?" Then we hear lots of interpretations but we don't hear an emotion. If I don't hear an emotion, it means that the person cannot tell me. He tried to tell me, but we're often trying to fill the gap of not feeling with something, with kind of all kinds of interpretations. That was, maybe, helpful in order to stay kind of connected to a social or cultural environment—either at home or in our school, in education time—but it's actually not authentic to us. It's not what we really feel. We are just filling the gap of not feeling with something.

We are saying now: okay, what is if *not feeling* is an important, very important aspect, and if I learn to listen and honor myself for turning the emotional content off, I align with the process, which means I become more congruent with the process? Like a surfer on the wave—and when the wave comes up, we stay on the wave, when the wave comes down, maybe we find another wave. If the emotion is like a wave, and I come with the wave, and if there's no emotion, if there's numbness, so then that's the authentic process awareness. I don't fill it with something because I feel that other people want to hear how I feel but I can say "Yeah, I lose myself," which means I stop feeling myself. Or, the other version of "I lose myself" might be that I drown in my feelings, that I get overwhelmed and flooded by my emotions, and that's why—like when I'm full of water and the waves crash on top of my head, and then I'm under water. Usually it doesn't matter what it is—I say, "Okay, this is it," and I become congruent with the current process.

If we meet disassociation, and we really meet it, we already feel numbness. In the moment we feel numbness, usually it often turns back on, except we are meeting a part that is so traumatized that it needs some other relational support, so then we need to go to a professional person that can help us to integrate those, because they are too much for ourselves.

I love it because the nervous system is super intelligent. So, the nervous system, once we contracted and hold an overwhelming experience, actually, either we break it open through something which is even more painful or it opens up when there's the right environment. That's why in the healing work or integration work, what we do a lot is to create the right environment—and, I believe, also in the conflict resolution work. We are creating environments for a conflict—as William loves to say, the third side—we are creating a third side in order to create the right environment for a transformation to take place, and that's a high art. To create the right environment means that I can sense what the moment needs and relate to it. I meet the need of the moment because I feel it. Then the other person feels seen because the other nervous system gets that there's authentic recognition. When one nervous system feels seen, and there's an authentic relation, usually there's a relaxation. And that's what we hear in some of the examples that William brought in the past sessions, that in the moment the person feels seen, there's a... there's immediately kind of a deeper relation that creates an opening. That opening is kind of a new possibility.

Right. And once we are reconnected to ourselves, we get back to our compass, and then we usually get back to kind of a possibility of responding or making a decision, or kind of being in the navigation system again.

Q&A: Trauma Fields Are Collective Scar Tissue We Are Born Into

Participant 1: I have a question regarding the potential side or the generator side of that process, also on the more collective level. I participated once in your healing event in Berlin, and after that I had a perception as if I could see more of the vitality that could be—in this case in Germany—that could really be part of the collective but that isn't, in a way, that is covered by something else. I don't have a specific question, I just would like you to comment on that in some way.

Thomas: Mm-hmm. You said it beautifully, and I think we will address this topic, maybe, next time, also when William is back. Especially in the last years, I speak more about the dimension of collective trauma, that actually, that many of our trauma histories are not just our personal biographies but actually are frozen territory that we have been born into.

And I think your description is very beautiful because you're saying, "Oh, I sense the possibility of the higher vitality, but somehow it's not." I believe that that's very true, that our nervous systems are used, I call it, that we are used to drive our car always through a foggy landscape.

Participant 1: Hmm.

Thomas: Many of us are used that we are driving through fog. And we have been born into a foggy car already, like a car that drives through a foggy environment, so we are used to the fact that we only see 10 meters, and then... So we're driving, and we learn to drive—you know, 10 meters is not a lot of space, so many things happen in our life that we cannot really explain or that we are struggling with. But if we were to see 300 meters without fog, many of the things that are coming towards us, we would already relate to them in a very different way. But if they just appear in front of our car because it's foggy, it's an issue.

I think that's a little bit of a description of how we can envision the collective trauma field, that there is a field that we have been born into that is part of our neural networks and part of our epigenetics and is stored in us, that holds a lot of vitality and energy but it's suppressed in the collective sea of unconscious material. There is a lot of energy. Our nervous systems, I believe, are busy with suppressing and denying a lot of information that is unprocessed.

New generations are kind of breaking it down into small pieces. So every one of us took a bite of the cake and is now working through this bite of the cake, and we call it personal issues, but actually we are just trying to digest life and major catastrophes all around the world, we are trying to digest those catastrophes because they were so overwhelming that at that time it was impossible to have that experience. I think that that's really—what you mentioned—is really, that's, I believe, the leading edge of healing and integration and also conflict resolution, to learn more about those collective fields that dim down our capacity. Our nervous system, I believe, in it's original state, is way way more sensitive, connected—and through that kind of field we feel as if we walk through our life all the time with a heavy blanket but because everybody walks with a heavy blanket, or many people, so we think it's normal, so that's how we got used to walk until somebody will take off that blanket, and we will see and feel how it feels to take a deep fresh breath of air. But that fresh breath of air is so rare.

[01:30:00]

And then some people, when they have kind of awakening experiences or when this lifts off for a moment, so we feel, wow, what a capacity is in our nervous systems, and that we are actually one human supercomputer, not separate laptops. In this broken-down trauma field, we experience ourselves much more separate and less connected, and that's why I think, in this trauma field, lots of frictions and difficulties come up that are a symptom of something much more fundamental.

So yeah, I agree, there's a lot of vitality bound in us, and I think, given the time that we live in and the technology that we use right now that connects us all around the world, it makes trauma impulses travel so fast around the world that we are actually forced to look at the new territory. Not just as... intellectually we know there is collective trauma—but in our experience this knowing often doesn't help. So I think we need to develop tools to exactly address what you brought up. I think that's our learning edge at the moment, very important learning edge for many questions that are also being raised here on the course.

But please tell me if you want to add anything, or?

Participant 1: Yeah, it touched me when you said I'm born into this. I then get this image of being like, having contact with that innocent child that is just in that sense... in that frozen world and doesn't understand why it's so frozen but remains... Yeah, I feel I remained, at some level, in touch with that perception, but then it got very confusing to be [inaudible] in that field.

Thomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative), I talked recently with somebody that is a second generation Holocaust survivor, from a second generation family. She said, at the beginning of her life, she was all the time looking at the dysfunctions in her until—she became a psychoanalyst—she walked her own path through it, at least to a certain extent. She said the more I got the framework to what is really happening in my life, it was so helpful for her to realign with it. I think many of us will, through the awakening into that collective trauma fields—that's something real and it affects billions of people around the world—that we actually have been born into scar tissues. You know, if you have a scar tissue on your skin, you see that that's not a regular tissue. And we can imagine, if you're born into that area, we are born into distortions. We are not experiencing reality, our perception is not even capable of doing that properly. I think that's such an important topic, as you said, that we somehow know it, but we don't, we are lacking yet the framework to fully give this kind of intuitive knowing a base. Then, from that, we could we really develop powerful tools to integrate that and see: many conflicts that we see are actually symptoms of that unprocessed kind of lake that our culture is built on, often.

Q&A: Feeling and Understanding Are One

Participant 2: Hi, Thomas.

Thomas: Hello.

Participant 2: I'm a little stuck at the scar, you blew me away with the scar, the scar comment at the end, but I have a comment and a question. The first is a comment, and I'm wondering if you're familiar with appreciative inquiry, because part of the...

Thomas: A little.

Participant 2: I'm sorry?

Thomas: A little, yes.

Participant 2: Yeah, I thought the reframing you talked about was so beautiful, and the idea of not looking at things so much as problems as mystery, so I thought I'd bring that up with the group.

And then what my question is, it's kind of a hypo/hyper question. On the hypo side, can you talk a little bit about disassociation versus intellectualization? And then on the hyper side, when we are feeling the feelings and we're feeling, maybe, a little overwhelmed, we're in overwhelm, is it necessary to separate our feelings from others? What is your feeling on the hyper side?

Thomas: Can you say a little bit more about separating our feelings from others?

Participant 2: Yeah, so if someone's talking to me, and I'm feeling a little charged, then I get the sense that perhaps what I'm feeling is some of what of they're feeling, and the difficulty of, "Wait a minute, is this my feeling or their feeling?" Or then even rebounding and realizing, "Oh, wait, I've got to dissociate, and this is too much, so I'm going to intellectualize what's going on." I feel like I'm kind of going back and forth, trying to be in the moment.

[01:35:00]

Thomas: Right, I got it. Yeah, so I think very important also, as in the process awareness, I think that's a very important question because I think many of us will at times feel confused. Okay, what am I feeling right now? Am I feeling a transference? Am I a part of somebody else's energy transference? Am I in my own hyperactivation or dissociation? These are very important process questions, I think, that you are asking.

First, the intellectualization is, I believe, something that sits, often, on top of the dissociation. So, first I don't feel—because when I feel, I'm connected to life. It's like when I feel I'm swimming in the river and I know that I'm swimming in the river, I'm swimming consciously, so I feel life. When I stop feeling life, I need to over-rationalize the moment, and I'm going into a function to try to find out what I should do. When I hear myself asking, "Okay, what *should* I do?" I immediately go back and say, "Okay, what am I not feeling right now, where is my compass?"

And our compass is something that grows through relation, I believe. The compass grows through a deep intimate relation with our parents, we get a kind of a compass in life. We get grounded, we feel our bodies—our bodies are kind of part of nature and life—and then, through an emotional connection, we get a kind of compass or a GPS system in life. Our intuition is connected to it. And then the rational mind is a natural part of the whole. Then it's beautiful, because then I can be very kind of educated and developed in my rational capacity but I will not use it in order to fill the gaps of not feeling. I think our brains and our nervous systems are actually masterful Photoshop users. The part that I cannot feel, I fill with something else, and then this becomes, after some time, normal. This becomes kind of my reality, so my perception is cut to a certain extent, my sensory awareness of myself and you is cut to a certain extent, and the black holes that are missing are filled with something else. Then I have the feeling, okay, that's my normal experience.

There is... this hypo side is kind of very numbed out, very dissociated, and around this often is a hyperactivated side, and in the hyperactivation, many people get reactive, because when I feel somebody is in stress, so then I might get the transference of that stress and try to protect myself instead of *feeling stressed*. It's like we are both going for a run on the beach and then, let's say, you run faster, so I run faster with you, and then, slowly, through our conversation while we run, we slow down the pace, so that one nervous system develops the ability to really feel and get the transmission of hyperactivation, and through the capacity of not rejecting that, I believe, we can slowly, slowly take down the stress level together. Two nervous systems are dealing with the same activation becomes a double, like 200% of resource. Then, slowly, slowly, we can relax it in order to be able to get the rest of the capacities back online.

The question that you asked is a very refined and a very important question that, I think, we need to refine over, also, a longer time—because in the moment I'm not clear what is transference and what is my feeling, I know one thing: I know that I'm not clear. Because as long as I'm fully aware of the process, I can discern this, too, I know this. If I don't know, I know already that one part of me got involved. Not involved in compassion but involved like an unconscious part of me participates in the situation. That's good for me to know because, if I take my own evolution seriously, then every time I have a situation like that, what I do, I make myself a note, and then I see who is a person or a mentor in my life to help me refine my process awareness. First, what I suggest to many people in our groups is kind of keep a diary or take a small booklet with you. Every time you run into a situation that you call difficult, make a note, and then the first step that we do is in the evening, a little bit later, whenever we have time, let's sit down and review a few of those moments and just take a few minutes—or before we go to sleep. It's kind of like digesting the day.

Then I say, okay, I have this situation and I sit down and I use my contemplation in the more quiet moment to deepen my awareness of that given moment during my day. I start to consciously digest difficult moments and I don't allow them anymore just to go by unnoticed—it's difficult, and once it's over, I'm happy, and I continue with my day. No. When I experience a difficult moment, I come back to it later and I look at it myself first. Like the hierarchy of the question is: I apply my own intelligence in a more kind of spacious moment and I contemplate the situation, and I see if I have insights myself. What happened there? Then, if I find out that I cannot get to a deeper kind of result or I don't see, even if I take more time, I don't see more clearly, then I either go to some peers, like my practice partners, or I go to kind of a supervisor mentor that I want to have in my life when I'm somebody, especially when I'm somebody that works with people, and say, "This and this happened, and let's look at it."

Then we learn to discern more, okay, what's the part in my energy field and what's the part in the other person's energy field, and where was the partly unconscious overlap. Usually, especially when we are more experienced in the interpersonal work, we will see that we get already that. If I'm totally unconscious, I don't get it at all, I'm just entangled. Once I'm already more conscious, I get that I don't see something here clearly, but I'm not fully sure what it is. Then I need somebody to help me refine it, until I more and more come to my own clarity, through contemplation and kind of inner reflection. That's what I would do, but I think, to make notes and revisit difficult situations—especially for us, that we are constantly practicing awareness within culture, within the marketplace—is super important function. I think, we have to do that. Otherwise we just recreate similar difficulties again and again and again.

And I think, also, the function of being able to presence somebody else's discomfort without rejecting it—because if I allow my nervous system to feel somebody who is very activated or numb, activated or numb, and I can just presence it in myself, my nervous system sends a different impulse back that is already bigger than the process. If I reject that tension or stress in me, I will be part of an interpersonal dynamic that will kind of perpetuate the past, perpetuate that pattern. And if not, I will be part of a new possibility. That's how I would go about it, but please tell me what you...

Participant 2: So what's hitting me is that, from a process standpoint, we are both feeling and understanding. Really, the feeling has to come first, and if we are really feeling then we are understanding.

Thomas: Right.

Participant 2: Is that correct?

Thomas: Right, I think, in the coherent aspect of our whole nervous system, the understanding and the feeling are one.

Participant 2: Okay.

[01:45:00]

Thomas: When they are fragmented, I already know there's some kind of unconscious gap, even if it's small, that separates these two functions. Otherwise, when I feel and I understand, so then those functions really work together. They are one and the same. So that the mental energy and the emotional capacity are connected. I think that's when somebody has been really supported, also, in development, to develop one's own voice, that I'm really connected to my needs, my emotions, my body, my thoughts, my intelligence, and I got appreciated and really listened to, and I could develop, in relation, my inner voice, and then this becomes one unit. And I think that's when the voice, when the action, and the word and the action are congruent. What I say expresses what I think, what I feel in my body, and my action. It's one. I think, that's when I transmit, in communication, the highest clarity that I can transmit. That's my highest contribution to a situation, that I send out one coherent message into the world when I speak. Then I will relate to whatever is the process. Yep.

Participant 2: That's helpful because I saw it as two different skills.

Thomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Participant 2: I thought feeling and understanding were simultaneous skills to practice.

Thomas: Yeah, yeah, I think when, inside the nervous system, the healing happens, the understanding often comes in as a result of the restoration of the energy, but it's kind of one and the same. It's kind of that the higher cognitive functions and the emotional functions and the physical functions are working together. It's like the orchestra of our evolutionary state at the moment as humanity, and I think that's super important because so many potential shadow factors—like technology, for example; for people who are really embodied, technology is a blessing, for people that are really partly disembodied, technology just might support the use of whatever, mobile phones and virtual media, and surfing on the internet might increase the already kind of partly disconnect inside and increase that disembodiment.

The disembodiment, again, increases, for example, how we deal with climate change—because we don't feel nature anymore, so we need all kinds of moral rules instead of a healthy connection to your environment and a lifestyle that is congruent with our environment, and so on. There's a cascade of follow-up processes that are also out of alignment afterwards. Like we create, all the time, ripples in the water, and so the embodiment is a very important aspect, also, I believe, in our time, so that the rational and the emotional and the physical development are really grounded, so that we ground everything that our brilliant minds at the moment are able to develop, build, technology that we build, and all of this, will be, and scientific insights, will be grounded in our bodies. I think that's what we, I think, should wish for, and I think that's also one of the biggest challenges, by the way, of our time, is to embody the rational evolution fully, through our nervous systems.

Participant 2: Thank you.

Thomas: Thank you, great! Fantastic for us as a course, also. Thank you.