

From Stress to Strength MASTERING THE ART OF RESILIENCE

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Thomas: Yes, we are back. I have lots of things to talk about with you. Before we start, I would love to recap a little bit, again, what we did last time, and also respond to some of your questions—some very fantastic questions coming in, very thoughtful, beautiful, also very practical questions—so I want to respond to a few of them right now.

Then we will—I hope you had time to write the journal—whenever you use the word ‘stress’ or when you get into tight or challenging situations, to make a short note, and then we will take this into our contemplation today and review a bit what is the structure of stress, what are the patterns of stress, because most probably we’ll find out that it’s not so many different things, but that there is a kind of a red thread through our life, and if we really get to the underlying patterns and we create an awareness of those bigger patterns, so then it’s much easier to say, “Oh, wow, these are a few things that I can really work on.” That will lead to a deepening and also a higher resilience, as we said—because the course was about “From Stress to Strength”—to use the moments where I actually, most probably, disconnect or resist my current experience, or disconnect from the current experience or distance myself, and how to use those moments in order to learn something about myself, my life, and transform it into strength.

Review: Restoring Chi Flow and Hosting Our Emotions in the Body

Last time we talked about two major—besides smaller aspects—but two major issues. One was that, we said, chi—like in Chinese medicine chi—is life energy’s movement. That movement, I believe, is an effect of the movement of our soul.

When the soul equals, in a way, our core intelligence—that’s energy in movement. So to speak, the river that the boat of our life, in a way, swims in, or drives on, we are in the waters of our intelligence all the time. We might sometimes, or more often, forget that interconnectedness, or not feel that interconnectedness—that the movement of our soul is an inherent evolutionary energy, kind of a drop of light that pulsates through our veins and energy channels.

Then one effect is my vitality, my aliveness, my motivation. So, that motivation is a movement, we said. Whenever that movement bumps against tighter areas—that are kind of effects of stuff that happened in our development, in our family, in our education system, in the bigger society, in the global structures, individual and collective traumatization—so, many things might be stored, kind of tight pathways in our energy field, and when the movement of our life bumps against it, we experience this as stress.

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So, that's why, I think, every, or most of the cotemporary spiritual practitioners that are living their life the marketplace, in culture, are cultural architects, co-creative cultural architects—as we all are—so we have to have a good shadow work or trauma work, if we experienced trauma in our lives, in order to get to the root of the symptoms that we experience.

So, we talked about that chi flow, that vitality, and that's the money that I have every day—to work, to run my business—but my business is my life, and so I have a certain amount of life energy for that. And we talked about regenerating factors last time—like good sleep, eating healthy food, where also the chain of production is healthy. It's not just what I eat but it's also where it's coming from, what's the system that I incorporate into myself. And then we have emotional balance, and then we have intimacy in our lives, sexuality—different parts that, actually—beauty, walks in nature, being grounded—there are many aspects that actually help us to recharge our battery.

And most of all, of course, the plug-in to the original power outlet—however we call this in our language—but the deep inner connection to the original creativity of the universe. That's the super charger. All the other things are small chargers, most probably not from the original provider, but there is an original charger that has the highest quality, but that original charger is remembering more and more where we're coming from. In recharging my chi and living a lifestyle that is sustainable, we said, where we had less and less carry-on baggage, but we live our life more and more sustainably—we look at the stuff that is difficult and see it more as a teacher than a problem. We learn to say, okay, these moments are key, they are important. I develop a love for those moments, where the abandonment within my own self shows up, parts that are not fully participating in the flow of life show up.

The willingness to switch from 'problems' to 'challenging teachings', to say: "Okay, there is something for me in those moments, and I pay attention." The first thing is, I pay attention, I feel into it, I look at it, I have time to reflect on it, and I create a bigger space of awareness around those moments that I experience as stressful.

We also said that the substance—and somebody asked that she understands physical substance, but if there is also emotional substance and mental substance.

And in my understanding, when I use the word 'substance', it's, in a way, all the three together, which means that the physical substance, the emotional substance, and the mental substance together create our feeling of substance.

That's my joy to think, and to explore life, and to explore science and philosophy, and use the cognitive capacities. That's my joy to be an emotional human being—through our emotions, we are connected. As we said, sometimes fear is misunderstood, but fear originally was an emotion of connection. If we split it off, and if we store it, and it's through other, more traumatizing events in our life, it might become kind of an experience that I experience as a block, but originally, if it can move, it's an emotion. My emotions are my world of relating. It's my world, the colorful world of relating. And of course, my physical capacities, and how my body is built, and how my body metabolizes energy.

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But all the three together are, basically, the substance that we talk about. Of course, for some people one or the other has a weaker constitution, but substance is crystallized evolution. It is thousands of years of evolution expressing themselves through me and every one of us. So, that's crystallized substance. We inherit, in a way, that substance, and for some people it's very strong, for some people it's a bit weaker, and we will learn to live with the base that we start off with and, through our inner practice, as we said, we can really take care that the substance is being handled sustainably.

The second part that we did last time was change. Change as a function of life that is constant. That the movement of the whole system, that the whole system is not kind of a fixed house but the whole global system is all the time moving.

Change will challenge us. If we have a weak structure, it will challenge us, and it will challenge us if we have a too tight structure, if we are holding onto structure too much. In both cases change for me is something that I will protect myself from—or being overly changing without having a healthy base, so then I exhaust my life energy, basically.

Being in a healthy movement—that river that I said at the beginning—is key. Change often comes when structures open up, and then it might create fear. Somebody asked if I can repeat, again, how to be with that fear—or, basically, the question was: “How can I balance the fear?” We need to be careful if their phrasing ‘balancing the fear’ has a tendency of getting rid of the fear.

Let's say, I don't know, I run a team or I run a company, and things are changing, and it looks uncertain, so either I tighten up—because I don't want to feel this fear—I tighten up internally, but I also tighten up externally. I put much more regulations, much more controlling onto the system. Or I can act wisely—maybe I need to implement some changes, but it's not because I'm afraid and I'm contracting inside, so I pass my contraction on, onto the system that I work in—but because I can host my fear, and hosting my fear means that I'm willing to have a relation with my fear, that I can experience my fear in my physical body.

If the emotional experience is grounded in the physical experience, it gets a home. If my emotional experience is kind of surfing on top of my physical experience because they are disconnected, then my emotions will be very strong but there is, in a way, just a storm without the grounding.

Therefore, what we practice is that when we feel fear, then I can look, okay, where in my body do I feel fear? Then I say, okay, I feel fear in my stomach, I feel fear in my legs, I feel fear in my throat—wherever. I learn to relate the feeling to the body. So I feel the area of my body, I feel the fear, and I stay concentrated, and I intensify my awareness of the area in my body—or the areas in my body—and the feeling, and I stay connected, connected, connected—until the emotion will, through the contact with the body, transform itself.

Because usually these are packages from my past that the past sent to me right now in this moment. So, I experience the fear that is already stored in my system within a given moment. That's how we clear, basically, step by step. It's not just, "Oh, I feel my fear five seconds, and then I hope that's gone, and if it's not gone, then it doesn't work." No, no, no. It's, "I feel it and, if I can, I really drop in and enjoy the quality of fear in my physical experience".

Like this, I can reconnect the emotional body to the physical body, and then I can clean the fears, slowly, from my physical body, from, literally, my cellular memory. I can clear, slowly, slowly, the fears, more and more—and ground myself, open that area and infuse it with awareness. When we look at the human being's body and we see energetically that the area where the person is unconscious, it's usually dimmed down. That area of the body has less light expression or transmission as other parts have, where I'm more alive, I am more vibrant. I feel it inside. I feel, "Wow, I am alive", in certain areas, I feel them well—they are warm, they are lovely, I'm sitting in it, great.

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Then there might be areas in my body where it's hard for me to even concentrate on. It's hard, I don't feel those areas so much. Seeing from the outside, kind of more energetically, those areas also have less light transmission. They are spots with less sensitivity, with less awareness of that person, and there's a content stored, but unconscious—so it's disassociated. Then, if you relate to it at the beginning, we might experience them as numbness, not feeling, wanting to think of other things, wanting to stop the exercise or whatever—all the defenses. Then, slowly, slowly, if I honor myself for not feeling—because one day it was good for me to not feel—so then often the numbness turns into an emotion.

As I said, that's not something that I try to do quick, like a fast food practice, but something that I need to dedicate my time, my attention to. It's like you take somebody out to a good dinner, it's not that every five minutes you look at your watch, when the dinner is going to be over. The person won't feel so comfortable with it. So if you take your fear out for dinner—it's kind of attention-relation. Why? Because it's me. It's my energy. Maybe it's split off, and I experience it as kind of a bit disassociated or numbed, but when it returns—I feel it, and because I own it, my sensitivity can fully embody itself in that area.

Then sometimes we get the feeling the area gets hot, warm, expands, like you get the feeling of expansion. And I get that feeling, so I re-relate to life through my throat even more. Literally, I feel life through my throat even more, which might have the effect that suddenly I dare to say more things, I'm more related, my voice is getting freer, whatever, there are different—that's a very complex subject, of course—but it's an expansion.

What I think is for the regular practice to bring the emotional experience back into the body, and feel it in the body area, relax the nervous system, if we can, into that body area. Stay with it one minute, two minutes, three minutes. Feel it, give it time, breathe, and let the nervous system fully metabolize the fear—which means feel the fear, then the fear turns off and into free energy, so it changes its vibration, and the body area gets liberated. That one frozen layer or held layer cleans itself. Maybe there are others, so it's a longer term practice, but eventually I will re-establish my relation to myself. If I re-establish the relation to myself, I re-establish a relation to the world, also, more. That's a practice that everyone can do.

And maybe at the beginning I need a timeout, I need to revisit this situation afterwards and then I practice it. The better I get at it, I can do it while I have a conversation: I have a conversation with somebody, I feel that fear comes up, I tune in with myself—while I talk—I tune in with myself, I relax into the fear, I bring it back into the body, I ground myself into it until I feel, “Ah, I'm coming back into relation”.

Now, I said that's the regular practice. If I feel that a certain situation meets me in a very traumatized area, of course, then it might be hard to do that on my own, but then it's responsible to find support. Then I find a trauma specialist or therapist that can help me to do that work together in a relation, and give me enough resources until I can practice that alone as well, or more alone as well.

Connecting with the Audience: Overcoming the Fear of Public Speaking

Great, so that's what we talked about last time. Then there was one question that was also very interesting, I think, for more people. It's like somebody asked that she has a lot of stress in talking in front of many people, giving a speech or a talk.

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What is with that sort of stress? That's a very interesting thing because energetically, or in the science of energy, we look at it in a way that we say, good, there might be different levels of that stress, of course. One is if my belonging is hurt, and the structure of my own base is hurt, so then when I stand in front of many people, I feel that I'm not fully grounded. Then I am already a bit weaker and more insecure, most probably, or more numb—either I get afraid, or I get more numb. When I am numb, maybe I don't feel so much that it's difficult for me, but I feel that I'm not fully related to my audience. So I might stand on a stage, but my energy field has a cover. That cover prevents me from reaching the audience, really, with what I want to say, because in the middle between us is my own bubble.

If I suppress my experience, everybody in the audience will feel it—maybe for many it's an unconscious feeling, maybe for many it's a conscious experience—they see that I'm, actually, a bit separate. That has immediately an effect, of course, on what I have to deliver. It's not just standing on stage and not just making it through it, but it's about the relation that I can establish, kind of an electricity circuit with my audience. My audience is included in my experience, and I am included in the audience experience. It's kind of an eight-movement, a horizontal eight.

If I am in that eight, that's the best conditions that I can establish on stage in order to transfer or transmit what I'm passionate about, what I want to say. So, a hurt belonging, of course, will bring up fear, or as I said, inner distance or numbness. If I recognize that I want to go on stage and I'm already a bit distant, then I know, okay, now I'm not having my full experience because I feel distant. I don't feel fully warm, and open, and connected. That's something that we can work on.

Then there is another thing—so there might be fear, a certain amount of fear. Then there's a certain amount of excitement, we might be excited. Even I've heard interviews of rock stars or pop stars that are doing this standing in front of thousands of people since 20 years, and every time they go on stage, they feel excited. In my understanding, first of all, it's about what is my relation with that excitement, to that excitement. Am I relating to it—which means I have it, I really enjoy myself being excited—because if I try to be calm, or be professional, but I'm actually excited, I again start to suppress my experience because I have an idea about myself, I want to give the image of being cool, or professional, or whatever, calm, but actually I'm not.

I create a gap, and that gap is the stress, not the excitement. If I distance myself from myself, the bigger is the gap, the more stress I have. If I allow this rubber band to come back and say, this is me. Whatever I think about myself, I am now excited. I am bubbling, and I am not quiet at all. I relax into that energy and see if I can enjoy that energy and ground myself in it, instead of trying to get away from it. Then the interesting thing is energetically, in the science of energy, we would say that if I stand in front of an audience, the energy channels of my energy field need to grow. Why? Because I'm relating, let's say, if there are a 100 people, a 1000 people, or 20,000 people—that's an energy field. It's a kind of electricity.

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That electricity creates, if I relate to it, that loop that I said before. So if I give myself into the relation, from a certain point, my energy field will be able to host whatever crowd I'm standing in front of and create an energy flow. That energy flow is, actually, the best, as I said before, a circumstance to transmit art, to transmit intellectual knowledge, whatever we transmit, it's riding on that carrier wave that I am able to establish. The more I'm separate, even if it's genius what I have to say, it's going to be in that bubble. The transmission will be reduced, which means the word and the energy is not the same, which means my stress or my disconnect I will transfer onto the audience.

That's, most probably, also what will happen in the audience because most of the people are not always aware of transference processes, so they will be like, "Yeah, I liked that," or "I didn't like it." But "I liked it" and "I didn't like it" is not so precise. What does it mean, "I liked it" and "I didn't like it"? What is actually the process that happened there, beyond my likes and dislikes? That's the interesting part. If we coach people, or we work with people when they are on stage, so we are looking at where does their energy field kind of create a barrier with the audience, to the audience. That barrier is what we work on, because that's where we stop our experience.

There is something in the speaker that needs that protection, and if we work on it, we will bring back intensity in the speaker's experience, we will strengthen the inner self-contact, and then we can relax better into the audience, and into the relation with the audience, and the audience will be more part of me, which means everybody in the audience will feel much more that the person is included in what I have to say.

That's often also in intimate relations. We have stress in intimate relations where we are actually a bubble within a relation, not that my partner and me, we are included in each other. In the tight moments you will see that most of the time people are more separate. Why? Because there is already something that gets avoided in the relational field, and it leads to a separation.

We look, okay, what is, actually, this contraction about, and what is the part of the experience that cannot be included in order for the relation to become an emergent relation, to have a future. Usually, when we are separate, we don't have a future. We use the words and the tools and the behaviors of the past. We tried it out in a former conflict, it didn't work. We try it out today, and it will not work, again. Why? Because it doesn't have a future. When I contract, I cut myself from the future. So it will be harder to do something that is unique, that is inspirational, that is innovative, that brings in a new possibility. When I'm contracted, usually I'm not so connected inside to come up with something new, not something that I did in the past.

That's why, I believe, speaking in front of audiences is also a great experience. We can learn so much because the audience will intensify my own shadows, usually. That's why for somebody standing in front of a group it's great because it intensifies the whole inner energetic makeup, the kind of composition inside. Then we can work on it. That can be a very good process of expanding and finding more one's strength and voice in the world, so that the word and energy becomes the same. When the word and the energy is the same, we do not transfer stress. The bigger the gap between what we say and what's happening in the energy field inside, in the experience, the more gap—the more stress. The less gap, and the word and the energy—if we walk our talk, as we said in one of the sessions—the word and the energy is the same, and we transfer just that.

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When we talk about stress, when somebody is stressed, it's easy to pull other people into stress as well. Other people need to be grounded enough to not get into the same stress, same as me. If I work in an environment where lots of people are stressed, if I am grounded and I have a good core relation between space, energy, and structure, I already have a higher capacity to let the stress run through me. I feel that the person is stressed, but I don't need to join this person's boat. I feel the activation in his or her nervous system, I can listen to it, but I don't need to protect myself from it because otherwise I kind of identify myself with that stress transference, so I also feel stress suddenly.

In many systems or companies, or teams it might be that if a few people are stressed, the other people join it. Or we can allow the experience through us, but because I have enough space and I am not afraid to feel somebody else's activation, I can become a grounding factor in a social environment. Later on, in the second part of the theory, after our contemplation, I want to look with you at social change and the challenges of our time that might create a lot of stress, and the kind of dynamics of social change, and also how change, or mutual change, creates stress in our social environment.

There is either I become a factor that reduces stress in a system because I can allow the experience of my colleagues—so I feel it, I can witness it, and because I feel it I can ground it—I actually send another impulse back. Every time we can send another impulse back. But it doesn't work when I protect myself, I don't want to feel that you're stressed—then I'm already in the same energy. If I can receive you and I can send another impulse back, there's already a correction. The other nervous system picks up on a more relaxed nervous system's impulse. But if I join the other person in the stress, I will also feel like this. Stress can transfer itself and bring more people into stress, or stress can be reduced through people that are not joining that boat, and then there's a change impulse in the system.

Helicopter Mind at the Root of Sleep Disorders

When we talk about sleep, I think we need to see that evolutionary-wise we are living in a time where the evolution—if this is our mental body [*draws a wide box at the top and labels it with "M"*—charges our mental body through scientific studies, through technology. We are using a lot of our mental capacities, so they get supercharged at the moment. That's an evolutionary phase, but not only—because the more that level of development meets traumatization, it actually can become a bit like a helicopter [*draws a propeller on top of the box*].

So it has a rotor, and it has an engine. The more the electricity charges the mind, that engine starts to work. It might lead to the fact that my mental capacity—many people might experience this through meditation—when I sit down, wow, my mind goes crazy. [*Makes a sound of a propeller.*] I can sit one hour, and I'm just thinking, thinking, thinking. That means that the battery of my mind, it's an electricity system. If I overcharge it, it has too much charge. It needs to discharge itself somewhere—either in my meditation, which is good, or during my sleep.

And then, evolutionary-wise, this sits on this emotional experience [*adds a narrow box underneath the wide one and labels it "E"*] and it has a potential breaking point. Then last time we said we also have that physical self, physical part of our experience. That physical part, let's say, is plugged into the planet—that's the planet [*draws a line across the third box, representing planet surface*]. But the physical part—this is my body [*labels the third box with "B"*]. So, the t-shirt that you see here, up [*points at the first two boxes*], doesn't fit into the trousers [*the third box*]. You see? The t-shirt doesn't fit—if these are trousers—doesn't fit, cannot be fixed with a belt.

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What that means is that gap is a danger—in our time, I believe, a systemic danger—that we disconnect more and more from our physical experience, maybe even from our emotional experience, and that engine here [*circles the propeller*] starts to work. It starts to work through electricity, through an overcharge [*draws arrows at the top*]. So, if there are traumatized areas somewhere in the body, the electricity that I work with stays in my mental sphere. Usually, in the healthy self, that energy should go down into the earth. It's like a lightning rod. This should ground itself here [*continues the arrows into the ground*].

I believe, because we hear more and more that people have difficulties with sleeping, sleeping patterns are changing. And, I believe, one reason for it is the danger of the mind being like a helicopter that is kind of, in a disassociated way, flying on top of the experience. If we don't take care of it, either that's anyways so like the other version would be, that that's so connected that all the time energy being channeled through these systems: that's the nervous system, the neocortex, the older parts of the brain down the spine—so it's mental, emotional, physical body, and the inspiration. If that's one unit, so the whole activity has a movement downwards, grounds itself, and has a movement upwards, a motivation for me to live.

That's the version where the electricity can go down and ground itself, and it goes into the earth, or it stays stuck somewhere. And we all feel this in the areas when I suddenly say, "Oh, my heart feels tight, and I have a pressure in my heart. I have a pressure in my back. I have a pressure in my head." Then the charge hits a form of trauma or a shadow, and here is an area of reduced movement [*draws a dark square between "M" and "E"*]. Electricity cannot download itself or ground itself, through my body, into the ground. That's why I said last time that we need practices during the day, when I feel it, that I overcharged parts of myself, that I have an inner regulation practice, like a minute of silence, a minute of feeling my body, my feet, and grounding my experience, until I feel, wow, the electricity in my head grounds itself through my body, and grounds myself in the room, and I am back, again, and I am present.

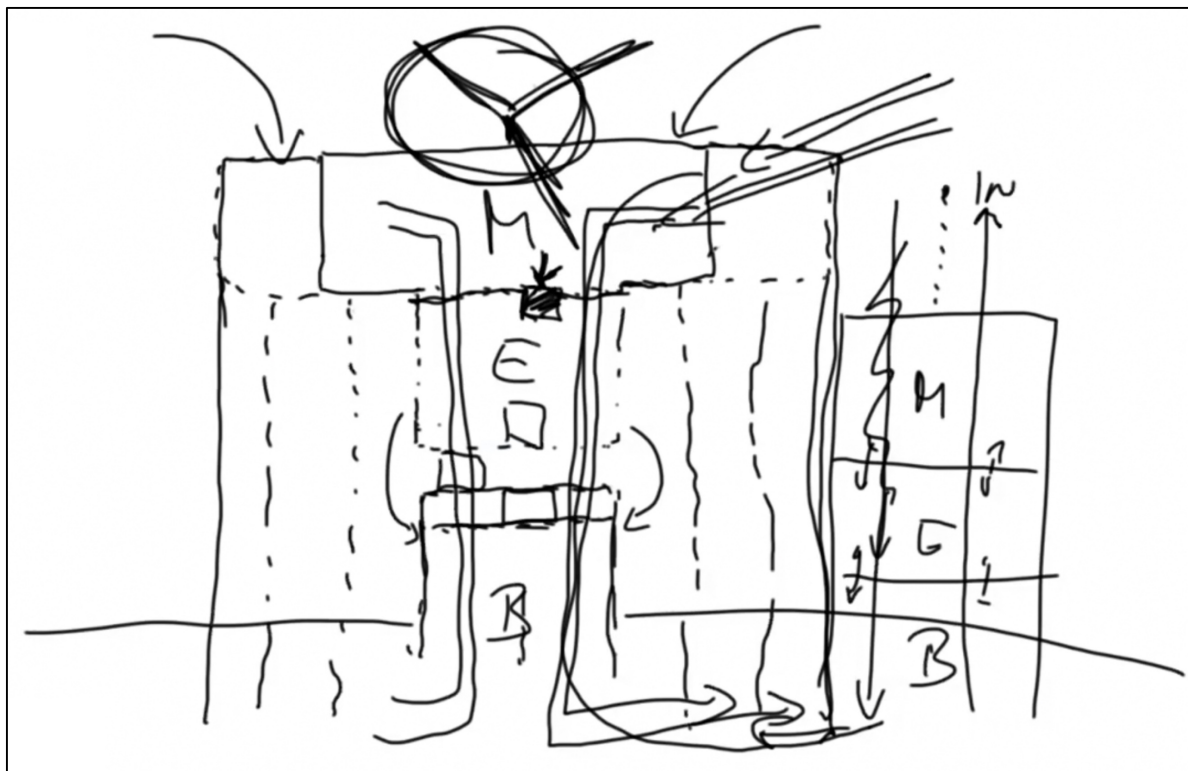
The more my mind will start to be a helicopter mind, I will, actually, be also less present because, oh, I didn't do this phone call, or I should do this, or I missed this, or I haven't told this person that. So my mind is going more and more crazy, and maybe also parts of my brain will create inner circuits of movement that have a life of their own. That leads eventually to psychological disorders, and then more. One thing is that, maybe, if my mind is too charged, or my mind and my emotions are too charged, and it cannot ground itself through the body, so then either I cannot go to sleep, and I will lay down and be awake for one or two hours processing, or I will fall asleep, but then I wake up in the middle of the night, and I cannot fall asleep again, and maybe multiple times, or my dreams will be very active—in my dreams, I am processing what I do not process properly during my day.

Or I go on vacations, but on half of my vacations either I am in bed because I've got the flu, or I spend half of my vacation thinking of my work. So, that means that I have this carry-on baggage—either into my night, into my meditation, or my vacations—but I am not able to regulate myself, so that when I go onto vacations, I'm present with vacations; if I go to sleep, I go into a nourishing sleep; if I go to meditation, I can deeply practice meditation and drop into deeper layers of consciousness—that's what I also at least want to explore.

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I wanted to just bring in this principle that we are kind of, when the mind's too expanded, and evolutionary-wise the mind potentially gets more expanded also through all the virtual work that we do if we don't practice grounding the virtual space through us—we will become more mentalized. That means that we need to strengthen our grounding, so that eventually the house has a bigger flower pot to ground a global, also virtual and internet reality, and scientific reality, in order to have a stable base that the new level of evolution lands on, so that the house is actually becoming a bigger stable house in the world. The energy that comes in can ground itself and become an energy circuit.

In here information is flowing upwards and downwards. I go up and out into the world, and I receive inner intuitions or I receive the world and I can ground the world in me. That becomes kind of an electricity circuit with the world. Every time, every moment that we can experience that circuit, we are describing this as *responsible*, or *'able to respond'*. Every time that circuit is cut, so we are more reactive, and we call it more 'challenge' or 'problem'.



Drawing 1

Great, so I'm back. That was the first part. I think, very practical applications of what we talked about.

Then I want to take you, again, onto a guided journey. We will also look a bit, if you have your journal at hand, like, handy, let's have it ready, so that we can—or maybe you looked at it already—I will ask you a few questions. Then we'll see if we can find some new insights together. Before we go into this, let's get into a more meditative state. Then, in the second part, I will ask you some questions around your findings when you see the word 'stress'.

Begin Meditation

Well, let's sit back, again, with an upright spine. As we practiced it already, let's take our awareness, through our breath—every time you exhale, you exhale into the body, then you exhale downwards into the body.

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Just take a few moments to only feel the simplicity of sitting, the beauty of simply sitting in a physical body, the miracle of the instrument of our body, the miracle of communication, that there's so much information being shared in the body between different parts, organs, muscles, joints, cells. The whole body stays in that amazing collaboration.

Again, as we did it before, you can sense into your body, also you can use that part that you use to imagine things, like an inner vision—when I imagine a project, when I imagine what happens in half an hour— I use the same function to look into my body, to feel into my body, I can feel my pelvis sitting on the chair.

I can also train myself to look into the body and see if I get a sense of how my pelvis looks like as well. So, I sense it, and I feel it, and I see it.

Maybe, at the beginning it's hard because how can I look into my body? Maybe, at the beginning it's very blurry, and nothing concrete. But our inner vision has the amazing capacity of kind of like an inner x-ray, and if we train it, it can become like an x-ray.

I can look into every aspect of my body. I can sense there. And it's important to combine those, if you use both. And also feel the parts of my body, as I said before, that are more alive, that I can feel properly—I feel movements, aliveness, presence.

Then there are parts of my body that are less accessible—maybe, I find parts of my body where it's even hard to feel myself.

Then, again, let's include, of course, let's have a check-in with my emotional world, how do I feel currently in my life. Am I very emotionally activated? Am I quiet right now? Which flavors of emotions?

Also, which flavors of emotions I usually kind of like to experience, or am open to experience—shame, fear, joy, love, sadness, anger—or which emotions I try not to have, try to resist, shut down, try to avoid. I avoid talking in front of people because I don't want to feel ashamed, which means I mean I avoid certain situations in my life that might be beneficial for me in order not to have a certain emotion.

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Where can I dance, and where do I stop? Not because stopping is good or bad—because I'm creating an awareness for me to be aware of why stopping is good, or was good in the past, and it might be expanded as well.

Then, again, we can feel our mind. The mind has activity, the mind has a quality—like the mind sometimes opens, as we said, or is more contracted. I can feel my mind. I can feel myself thinking.

I can feel if my mind is overcharged or if my mind has grounded its activity through the emotions and the body. Even if I work a lot, I can ground the charge, and I don't feel overloaded.

Then again to look, if I listen to my inner world, if I also experience a dimension of inner space, dimension of presence, timelessness, and I listen, for a moment, to the inner space, stillness, timelessness, capacity to witness, capacity to reflect.

Then, slowly, let's, out of this space, out of this inner, deeper spaciousness, let's remember or look at the notes that you made for moments in your last week where you said, "Okay, this was a stressful moment."

And the first thing we do is—if I take off the label 'stress', what is the experience, really?

[00:55:00]

When I say what is my deeper experience, when I labeled moments, or certain moments, cyclic moments that come back again and again—either in my relation, or in my work, or in any other situation—when I say I'm stressed, what is a more precise of description of your experience in your body, in your emotions, in your mind?

Then the first step is to say, "Okay, the deeper aspect of my experience, how much do I feel I'm expanded in it, or I feel I'm more contracted in it?" How much do I feel I'm grounded in it, or I can I feel I sit still in my body, or when I think of that incident, I actually feel myself a bit lifted out of my body—and just notice. There's nothing to change, just to notice with compassion.

To say, "Yeah, that's how I feel. Actually, I'm contracted in my base. My base feels smaller, and I feel activated." Maybe, my mind is fast, or my mind is more blank. What's my emotional experience?

Then to notice the whole composition in the mind, emotions, the body. There's a certain composition right now, when you think of that event in you. See if you can relax a bit more into that inner composition. Maybe it's a strong emotion, maybe it's an emotional numbness, maybe it's that you feel full in your body, and grounded, and warm. Maybe it feels more empty, distant, and kind of uprooted. Maybe your mind has a pressure, your mind feels blank, overcharged. Whatever is the composition—maybe you felt ashamed, or you felt angry, or you felt sexual, or whatever you felt—that's what it is.

Let's see if we can ground or relax ourselves more into that composition and listen to it. Listen to the inner representation of the stressful moment. I welcome it as if it's a friend—not something I need to get rid of, something that I would love to listen to. I want to understand this friend. I want to hear this friend's secrets. I listen, I feel, I connect, I give space.

Also, to see if there's a certain degree of resistance. Usually when we contract, we also try to prevent something to arise in our awareness. Better to say, we meet the past where we avoided something in our experience that we carry on—to moment, to moment, to moment.

[01:00:00]

If you meet a certain level of resistance—which might be a resisting fear to show up more, or shame, or anger, sadness, or joy, sexual energy, or an impulse to connect to somebody, an impulse to reach out and say something, or to receive another person with their experience, to receive somebody who comes closer with a certain energy, maybe—so, what's the composition? What's the composition in me, and of the orchestration in me?

And now I see how much, in that stressful moment, I am I still related to my environment. Do I feel separate and distant? Do I feel that I overpowered or over-controlled my environment—so that I'm too much outside, or too much inside? Do I still feel my environment—a person, a circumstance—or do I feel that I'm sitting in a bubble?

However, it is, again, to be with it like with a friend, not a problem—that's a sign post, a teacher. Listen to it and see if it was a very important teacher for your life, a mentor. That mentor is telling you secrets about your life that you want to hear. I explore it and I want to listen.

And another step is: is this a single event, or is this an event that happens more often in your life, maybe in a bit of a different composition? So when you expand the map of the exploration, is this something that is recurrent, that you meet in different situations, with different people, circumstances, again and again? The same challenge, the same composition, the same friend?

If it's in different situations, see if you can feel those moments where you already know that incident from as a field, like a necklace, a necklace that is connected, pearls interconnected through a necklace, similar compositions in different moments in time and space, kind of an underlying pattern that surfaces. To be open to listen to that pattern as well, as a thread throughout the composition of my life.

If I want to, I can also look, okay, in those moments am I experiencing myself in my grownup self, do I respond to the situation from a grownup capacities, or do I feel younger? Again, just notice with compassion.

[01:05:00]

So in the moment I feel younger, I also know—most probably, my past appears in this moment. Maybe, the moment reminds me of something or touches a place in me where I had strong experiences in the past, but immediately, I know: ah, this is shadow stress.

My past asks to become a partner of my grownup self. The past asks to be seen. Something that wants to surface—there's a voice from the past appearing on the water surface of now. It's an important voice.

That's not a problem. That's not a challenge. That's not stress. It's a voice from the depth of my unconscious past appearing in my waking consciousness. I can listen to it. I embrace it with my current awareness.

I know that most probably I'm experiencing the situation through the younger aspect of myself, at least as well. It's like a friend, a voice, a teacher, a mentor. A mentor with an important voice.

In case I don't feel younger, so I feel maybe that my channels of my life seem too small in order to channel the complexity. If the complexity of my life, the new aspects of my life are seemingly too much, so what can help me to expand my vessel, what is there for me to learn, to apply, to ask for, new resources to bring in?

How can I strengthen my vessel in order to become the cup that hosts complexity and more simplicity? What would be a responsible reaching out, bringing in, learning, establishing, developing of capacities that I need in order to meet the evolutionary dimension of the challenge?

[01:10:00]

At the same time, now, as I host that aspect of my life, that situation in me, how much do I still feel that there is the deeper connectedness to the river and the deeper trust into a more transpersonal intelligence that I'm embedded in that speaks to me as well through intuition, inspiration, creativity?

The messengers of our inner-connectedness, the messengers of an emergent future, a higher consciousness future that we are part of, that speaks to us every given moment; it is the basis of innovation, development—so can I listen to that resource as well?

Do I also find the right moments, from that inner-connectedness, to reach out? So, inner connection is a deep resource, listening to my intuition and my inspiration, and seeing what that inspiration surfaces in me.

If I contemplate a so-called difficulty or a stress, I can listen to the composition, and I can listen to the depth of my heart, my inner connection, my inner intuition, and let them communicate, let them merge. Let the deeper intelligence merge into that life circumstance.

From there, also to reach out to the world if I need support, if I need somebody to talk to, if I need to bring in new capacities, if I need to learn something, or if I need a therapist or a professional to resolve something—that's part of my ability to respond to life.

We have a connection to the essence of inside-out, and we have a relation on the horizontal, the collective intelligence, the we-intelligence. All of it gives a home to this challenging situation.

[01:15:00]

We just see, for now, if there is any insight, anything that you take from this exploration, any deeper melting, also, in your body, your emotions, your thoughts. Some new insights, intuitions. Might be change of the feeling in your body, emotions, and mind?

Slowly, let everything go again. Just feel your body. Take a couple of deeper breaths, and come back.

End of Meditation

Well, so that was one way how we can explore moments in our own self-reflection—so we ground ourselves first in the sitting and space, then we let the situation find its reflection in the coherence of our mental, emotional, and physical self.

It's kind of a vessel, cup. When I think of a certain situation that was difficult, it actually creates a reflection. I feel sensations in my body. I feel something in my emotions, my mental capacity will change—so there's an imprint in that vessel.

Then first I relax into it. I feel it. I see if I can really listen to it. Then we can see certain aspects, we can see the relation that we still have in the challenging moment, with the world. So if we isolate ourselves, if we're still connected horizontally, connected vertically through our essence. Then I see also if I can, first of all, find out what I resist, what is overwhelming, what I touch from the past.

If I feel younger and more regressive, I know, wow, now the past, this certain situation needs me also in my past, at least also. That's already a stress factor. The younger I get, the more I will feel the experience as stress, or if it meets traumatized areas in me, I will feel it as stress. So I know, okay, we are talking about shadow stress. It's something that screams for integration. There's a voice appearing on the waters of consciousness. That voice needs, actually, the situation to come up. They are partners. The situation that speaks to that part in me that I experienced as stress, but now we know it's actually something else—then I can explore that more.

Most probably you have seen, also when you look at your journal, there are only a few strands or threads that run through the whole amount of stressful situations. There will be cyclic patterns. So when I look at it from a higher perspective, I can see, wow, I actually see similar things appear again and again. Maybe there are two, three, four—but it's not a thousand different aspects of stress. So I have something to work with.

And then if I feel—no, I'm still in my grownup perspective, but simply my company expands, or I got a new job and I need to integrate many new things that I also need to learn, so that's about resources, that's about reaching out, that's about creating myself an environment for learning, and expansion—or I became a parent, so my life changes drastically—I will need to learn how to navigate and move in a new situation in my life that asks me to expand my vessel.

Then it's more about finding the right resources, learning, developing capacities, staying related, and having the right communication with the we-field in order to get the collective intelligence to participate in my life.

And, again and again, listen to that deeper river in me, through the healthy self-contact, where I listen to my intuition, where I listen to my GPS, where I listen to inspiration, where suddenly I'm like, "Ah, that's the way to solve it!" My intuition tells me to go that way. These are different resources. When I said before, "Let's experience for example, fear or other strong emotions through the body," that works only as long as I feel that there is at least a certain amount of stability and embodiment in me in that situation that I can still feel.

[01:20:00]

If I feel that I am very much in the air, and that I hardly feel myself or my body, then, of course, it's very, very important to reach out. Then it's very important to find in a relation a temporary stability that can help me to find more inner stability.

So, in order to reflect emotions within the body and process them through the body, I need a certain stability that I can rely on, kind of a resource that helps me to transform emotions. So if there's too little resource, then I'm just in the dissociation or strong emotion, so then I need kind of an external, I need relation as a stability to ground myself.

For today, that's something that is worth doing multiple times, until I train that muscle of reflection. Then the time delay of the situation and the reflection can be reduced, can be reduced, can be reduced—until I can do this reflection even in the moment when it happens. The delay of restoring the carry-on baggage into a full experience will—the delay, which is also a sign; the bigger is the delay, the less capacity I have to have, to have the full experience—it will become one. Then my vacations can be my vacations, my sleep can be my sleep, and my meditation can be my meditation.

The “Second Test” and Living in a Time of Global Birth Contractions

One thing that I still want to address, and then we maybe we still have time for at least one or two questions—we have anyway another call that is just for Q&A, so we will look to get to as many questions as possible—I will, again, use my drawing board. Last time we talked about change. I want to say that change for oneself is something—okay, I can change. But my change is only valid if I'm able to, or if it's that significant that it will manifest as my life, that I can walk my change.

On the outskirts of my change there are two possibilities. One is that if I change, my social environment will be happy because they were waiting for it. So if the people in my environment that already had that development will be happy for me to join.

On the other hand, my change will create pressure onto areas in my social network, people, or aspects within those people that resist change as well. Same as I might—in a company for example, one person becomes very successful, and the other people feel already the pressure inside. They are not conscious of it and aware, so they might project it and try to get that person down again. So there are lots of fights and hidden stories going on in organizations, and competitions.

Actually, it's a sign that it's hard for me to experience the resisting parts in myself, and be honest with them. So how do I grow? If I feel envy, it's a sign that somebody develops in a certain aspect that I also carry in myself. At least, when I feel envious, I know I learn something about myself. I learn something about areas of my future development.

So when there is change in a social system, change, on the one hand, will be experienced as joy for the people that can enjoy the change and are potential-oriented, and they really care for other people's development, they will be joyful. Every development increases the creativity and the freedom, and the intimacy in the world.

[01:25:00]

But for the other people, the growth, the clarity, the love, the transmission, the openness, the success of people might be scary, because I feel my own contraction in the face of expansion. If I feel my own contraction, there is an easy way to project it outwards. If not, then there is a great way for me to expand as well.

One social change factor is, I believe, what we call the second test. The first test is the first changes—a change within me, a growing awareness, integration, skills, development—but then how I relate that development and make it part of my social context, my cultural context, a part of my life. I walk it. I walk it in more and more moments until it's a fluid and embodied aspect of myself.

And then, I believe, there is another important thing that I want to share with you. Now I screen share my simple drawing, as you see [*laughs*].

We are living in a time where the very technology that we use right now makes us global citizens. Of course, we are still living locally—some more, some less, and it's good to have local roots somewhere. Maybe you feel, okay, we are at home. On the other hand, mobile phones, the internet, everything that enables this course right now, makes every one of us on the line a global citizen. Why? Because we are using a global technology. We are globally informed. Actually, technology creates a pressure onto the human system to create a global world view.

We built a kind of a global holon, but part of my thinking, my emotional world, my caring, my relation, and part of my physical embodiment might not be able to be a global citizen yet. Therefore, I think we're living in a time with global birth contractions. Those birth contractions sometimes are a little bit painful. They are pressure, tension. We love to label it, maybe, as 'stress'.

Actually, we are going through a kind of global expansion in humanity. And I'm not talking about an economy where a few get even more rich, and many people have less. I'm talking about a *healthy* expansion. Why healthy? Because the helicopter of our mentalized world will ground itself in a global context, and our body is the vessel for it. Our body is the closest piece of nature, part of nature in our experience. So, our body is part of the planet. Our emotions are part of a planetary relation, and the planetary caring. Our thoughts are part of a global mental world, a noosphere that embraces a global thinking.

Becoming Embodied Global Citizens

Now, I believe that there are two things. We talk a lot about the healthy self-contact, and then circles of intimacy. In our work, we look at—that's the relation of me and myself. That's the healthy self-contact. [*Highlights the vertical line in Drawing 2.*] Then I relate to my family [*labels the innermost circle with "F"*], I relate to my closer environment, maybe also my workplace [*"W"*]. Then I relate to the wider community that I live in [*"C"*].

I believe, now there is a new level that is, maybe, intellectually for a longer time present, but I don't think we are embodied global citizens. Now, through the very technology that we are using—when before the internet was there and before Facebook was there we, let's say, until this radius of the local community, we had 24 hours to process the information in that system [*writes "24h"*].

Now, let's say, if you spend three hours on Facebook, Twitter, whatever, surfing on the internet and learning about the global system more, you have here only 21 hours.

[01:30:00]

We have, on the one hand—in the mystical traditions we say there's realization. So, there's a global realization that, through technology, has a strong progress, very fast, but then I need to ground that global expansion through all the former levels of expansion.

You know, if you look—thousands of years ago there was most probably a much more local life than it is today. But that local life, as a condensed evolution, lives in our bodies and in our emotions, in our thoughts.

If a new development comes in—we realize it, but then we need to embody it. I need to be able to walk globally on the planet. But if I walk it, then the expansion of the system will create the pressure onto the other systems.

Metaphorically, we can say—with ours, but that's just a very simple metaphor. The global system—I am hearing about atrocities in Syria, and I can hear about them in a very fast pace through the technology of my mobile phone. I can participate in terror attacks, in many atrocities around the world. I see the beauty of expansion and acceleration of the development in the world, but I also hear much more about shadows, difficulties—on a much wider level. So, not only is it simplified as time—that the three hours that I hang around on the internet, I'm not spending with my family, I'm not spending it at work, and I'm not spending caring about my local community; so that will have an effect.

Before I had 24 hours, now I have three less. It creates a tension. And, at the same time, my nervous system needs to expand, my emotional system needs to expand, my body needs to expand. My cells—because my cells store me living in a tribe, me living in a closer community. My cells have all those layers of development inside.

And then, embodiment spirituality means that always the next level of development—there is a kind of initiation. So we are globally initiated, but we are not yet globally manifested, so that the caring for the planet, the caring for the questions in the world, the resonances that my trauma has with the trauma around me, or with the global trauma, with the collective traumatized areas—I'm exposed to much more traumatizing events through a global landscape. There are much more interferences, and much more information needs to be processed.

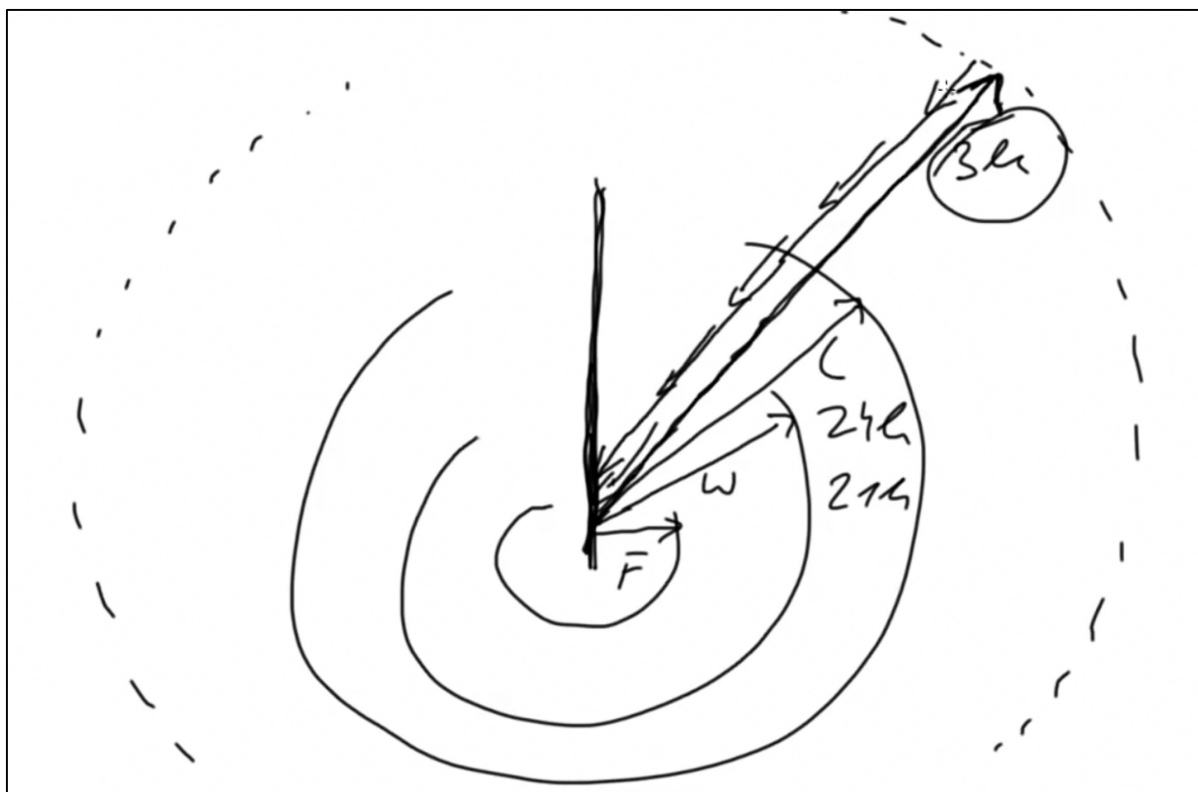
I believe, we are the generation, we are the people where that expansion happens. We are the ones that need to ground, and learn about that new development in a very creative and wise way, because if you do it wisely and according to the energetic principles, we will be able to ground it. If we do it unwisely, it will become a helicopter where many decisions will be made that are, actually, not beneficial for the nature part and the life part of our lives.

That means that, I believe, we are living in the birth contractions, and those birth contractions are a global stress factor—the expansion of knowledge to expand the speed of technology and of information, the amount of information, and the kind of information that we are exposed to, in a much faster pace than any time in history, most probably—except the mystical transmission of information, which is kind of timeless— but on an outer world level, we are in a time of a strong expansion.

And I believe, that's why it's so important that we practice—because we can balance that through wise practices, and also acknowledge the fact that we are learning something that we don't know yet fully how to do. When I hear about many things that happen in the world, my emotional body is constantly activated. If I really allow myself to feel what I read in the news, most probably I just need to read one headline, and I might be busy the rest of my day.

[01:35:00]

I believe that many people read the news—or we might all read the news—sometimes very intellectually, but if we really allow ourselves to witness certain events also emotionally and physically, I think, we have enough challenge to grow, to become real global, social witnesses and contemporary people that stand in the world and see, participate.



Drawing 2

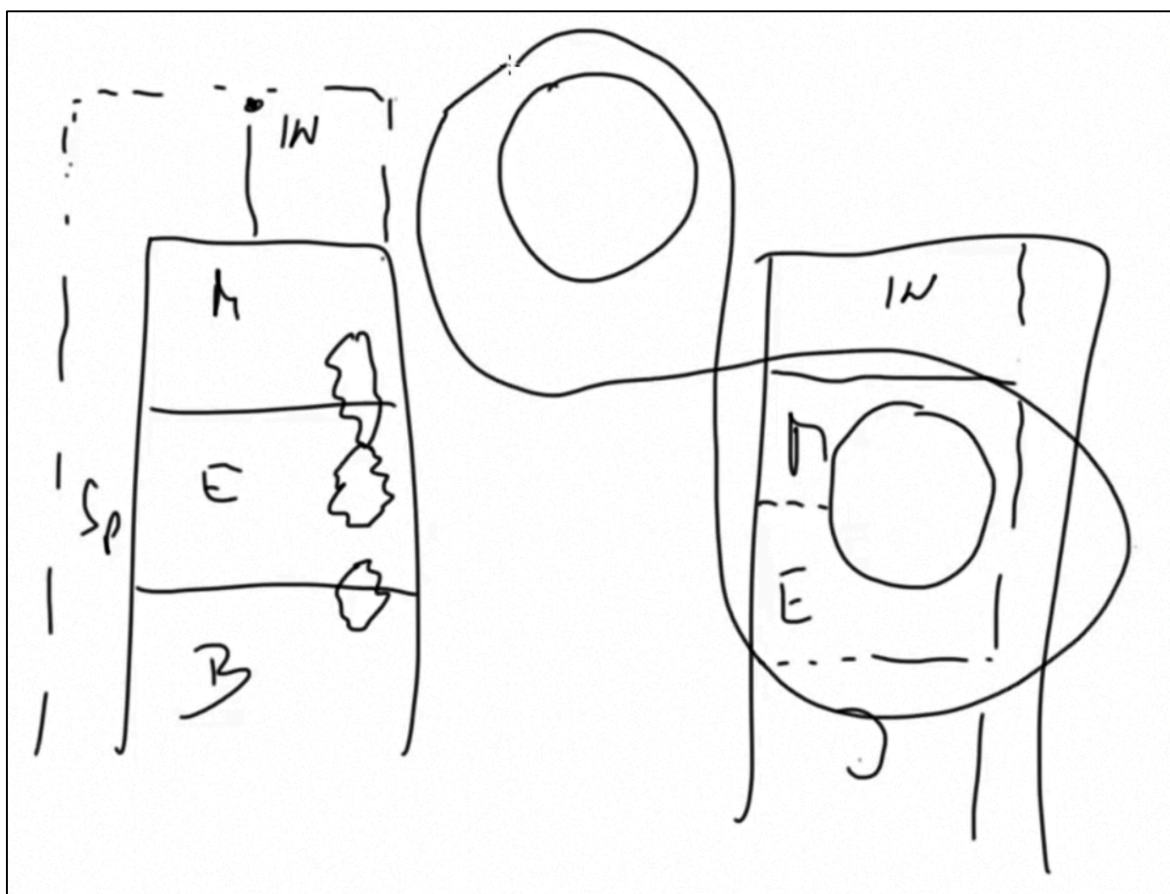
In order for the global sphere—the same as we did it before: when we have that mental, and emotional, and physical self, and then we have space, and then we have higher consciousness, or inspiration. The difficulty that I experience that has a representation in my body, in my emotions, so I have a reflection of that in me. I think about it in a certain way. I emotionally feel it, as we did it before, and I feel it through my body.

If I have the global consciousness, the world out there, it is also a world in here. It also has space, it has inspiration, it has a mental, emotional, and physical aspect to it. The world's, maybe, a bit bigger. There is a reflection, and the fuller is that reflection, the more intimacy we experience.

As you'll, maybe, remember, I think at the beginning I said, intimacy is like—we can describe intimacy as the moon, the reflection of the moon on a romantic summer night. You sit with your lover at the lake. It's a warm, bright summer night. The moon reflects itself on the water surface, and the moon looks exactly like the moon in the sky. If you are represented in me as the moon on the water surface, we experience each other as intimate, like there is a deep relation.

So, in order to create a global consciousness, the world that we live in needs to find a representation, conscious representation in the interior that I'm able to provide. If I want a conscious world, I need to become a conscious world. It's not a conscious world out there. A conscious world lives in me. A conscious world is my capacity to host a global process—in space, inspiration, mental, emotional, and physical aspects, at least.

I think, that's the challenge—that we carry our past, and our past filters in front of our eyes, so we need to take care of the filters that in me create only half—or a certain amount—of the world. The more I clear those filters and I expand my capacity into a global feeling, thinking, body sensations, caring—so *the world in me* and *me in the world* will be an eight [draws a figure eight], which means related.



Drawing 3

If we take this, maybe, for now, for today as the last part of the exploration, we see that we are called into a practice, and creating resilience in our life is a lifelong spiritual practice, inner practice, mystical practice, whatever practice. It's a lifelong willingness to explore life's process. And one thing is for sure—the earlier I dropped a notion how long it's going to take, the more fun I will have, and the more effective I am going to be.

[01:40:00]

It's not about "When will I be done with the challenges in my life?" which just says that I am resisting them. If I live my life, and I say, "Yeah, challenges are a part of my life; stress, so to speak, is part of my life." Because I know stress is just a cover story for a deeper process that either asks for my eyes to look into the past, to integrate an abandoned voice in me so that we can all sit around the table, or it calls me to look into the future—but not into the future because I don't want to live my life and I'm constantly dreaming about the future—I become the reflection surface of higher consciousness appearing in me as an emergent future.

It's inspirations, intuitions, new projects, new participation in the world, new solutions for current questions in my closer environment, but also me in a global environment. It asks me to be a constant participant in learning, in grounding my learning, and in being willing to adapt my social network so that I can participate in the collective intelligence, and the collective intelligence can participate in me. If that happens, so we are actually becoming, through stress, and realizing what are, actually, the stress factors, and if we do this work, many of us, I believe, we'll literally unify the web of life.

If we honestly and consequently are really looking at the levels of stress and learning the teachings, so we are able to host a future, and we are able to integrate our past, which means we are back to the love-making of the future with the past—and it's us. The more fluid that love making works, we are creative participants in the cultural process. I think that's exciting. That means that problems and challenges turn into teachers and possibilities, and a deeper wholeness of the world. I think, that's very exciting. It also makes us very equipped and conscious participants in an evolutionary process that is moving.

But it's not moving, and we are a separate bubble in it—it's moving, and it's moving through our veins. It's like the blood in my body right now, evolution is moving through my energy channels, so I'm actually not a separate bubble that swims in the evolutionary river, I am the water of the evolutionary river.

Sometimes, in tight situations, we might forget that we are always deeply connected to that original word. The word that has been spoken at the beginning of time, or at the end of time, or out of time. The creative impulse of the universe is always as an echo in everybody's heart. So, sometimes in tight or stressful situations we feel more separate.

It might be true in that experience, but the more I practice—in my open moments and, of course, also in the stressful moments—to feel and listen, and be connected to that river that holds uncountable possibilities, and it's a kind of a free super internet connection available for everybody. It's being connected to the original creativity of God, the Divine, the Universe, the Higher Consciousness, however you want to call it.

[01:45:00]

Q&A: Breath—A Reminder to Keep the Circle Open

Host: *Yeah. Thank you. Thank you, Thomas, so much.*

I was just noticing and appreciating how precise the teachings are that you bring, and also how everything is part of the practice. Everything is part of our practice—whether it's our contraction, our fear, our anger, our relationship to the world—everything becomes part of our practice in a subjective curiosity. Just to acknowledge that, it's a wonderful framing of this inquiry.

Maybe this also relates to that in a way. It's a question from Beverly about breath and breathing. This, of course, is a core part of many spiritual practices. She says, "What role does the breath and breathing play in being more present or more available to ourselves, and more awake to the elements of our experience with stress? What role does the breath or breathing have in us connecting to our current experience and transforming it into strength?"

Thomas: Yeah. Basically, it has a big role because the breath is, actually, a great partner for contemplative practice. So, if it's hard for me to be present in the moment, for many people it helps just to listen to the breath and to feel the movement of the breath, the movement of my chest. Also, the movement of me inhaling and exhaling, and what's the effect of me inhaling and exhaling in my body? It's something that helps me to create simplicity. When I'm kind of all over the place, the breath is centering and grounding me, eventually, more in the moment, in this current experience. So, that's a fantastic function of the breath.

The breath is also for people who— if it's harder for me at the beginning to feel the body, yes, the breath can connect me or reconnect me to the body. Through the breath, I can dive into my body experience and my inner landscape in a kind of, maybe, easier way. I sit down, I let my breath take me into the body. then I can refine my perception and ground myself deeper in the more subtle aspects of my body, when I listen to more subtle qualities in my body. That's great.

Then, not to forget a mystical principle—I mean, these are all mystical principles, but they are more known—that the Zen circle, the ensō circle that we see in the Zen practice, is open.

It's open for a reason, because it's open, and that means it's enlightened, which means it's not a closed separate system. None of us is a closed separate system. We are all connected, and our breath, I think, shows this the best. The most physical presentation of the open circle is our breath, because we need to breathe in and breathe out. We need to breathe in and breathe out, also, air that other people breathe in and breathe out. So, there is an inherently shared, even physical reality to our life.

And in the mystical knowledge, we say, "Oh yeah, but that reality exists on every level." It happens in relation. It happens through our thinking—because most of us don't think just new thoughts, because we are thinking thoughts that many, many people before us also thought. It's not so original, because Plato thought about it, and the mystics thought about it, so many people thought about it already. So, to think that what I think is so genius and new is most probably not true, because other people thought it before. I respect and build upon knowledge and wisdom of lineages that are lineages through evolution, they are lines through evolution.

On many levels that's also important, because it means that to keep the circle open, to practice fresh relations to the world, to see people, the closest people that we are connected to, to see them with fresh eyes—again, and again, and again—situations, to do things in new ways, to keep the circle open, which means it keeps my relation to the world open.

And not only that—if I participate in giving, a certain amount of giving to the world that is not just, "Oh, where do I run, money with it"—giving. Giving is something that I give without asking for anything in return. That service, that giving, if you look in the big traditions, the wisdom traditions around the world, it is an important factor. Why? Because it keeps the circle open.

[01:50:00]

It's not just about me. It's not just about what I get. It's also: we keep the circle open if we give something, and we don't care, and don't ask if anything comes back. Giving is giving, not giving "What do I get from you?" I give it, and I give it.

The breath, I believe, is a constant reminder that life is not just about me. Life is about something bigger, something bigger that I am embedded in, and something bigger that I can listen to. The open part of the circle unifies all circles. All circles are part of space, energy, and structure. That's exactly what we looked at in the course.