

THOSE NASTY LITTLE JUDGMENTS

HOW JUDGEMENTS REMOVE US FROM WHO WE TRULY ARE

TILKE PLATTEEL-DEUR

The older I get, the more I breathe, the longer I do the work, the more I am finally beginning to understand; how small seemingly unimportant judgments are clouding our consciousness. How poisonous they are. How they create ever more distance from who we really are, a distance that has been formed while growing up.

Growing up

The Emotional

As a new-born baby we are emotionally feeling beings. We are born innocent. The greatness of our soul with all its wisdom is trapped in a baby-body. We need constant care to survive, which makes us feel completely dependent, helpless, and very vulnerable.

We don't have speech yet to express ourselves. We cry, smile, and make little noises, which is the only way to make ourselves known. We encounter the world with all our senses. We smell, feel, and taste our way into life.

However, at a rather early age we begin to understand that our crying or smiling has an effect on the people around us. We begin communicating and interacting, albeit very primitively, with our surroundings. It's the very beginning of our manipulating the outer world. This world reacting to us as we are reacting to it.

The moment we begin to utter our first words and learn to speak, this naming of all the things and the people around us makes it clear that there is something as an "I" and something that develops as an "out there". Our curiosity to encounter the "out there" helps us to develop our physical capacities and discover the world.

At around the age of 7 we have grown from being a totally dependent baby into a more or less independent being. We have learnt to behave less vulnerable whilst losing our innocence. The judgements that are born then, inhibits the blossoming of who we truly are.

The Mental

We go to school, learn to read, write, and refine our communication. Our mental capacities grow, and we begin to discover our talents and develop a sense of Self. In this period, we also learn to compare ourselves with others, which often leads to experiencing a painful distance to other human beings.

We have by now learnt to suppress a lot of our emotions to appear as cool as other kids, thus protecting our vulnerability. Again, the reinforcement of "I" versus the "out there". We learn to lie about our feelings, losing our sense of being innocent and we begin to hate when we are feeling vulnerable, which we often do. Our judgements take the form in our separating ourselves from others.

The Physical

Entering puberty, we become more and more aware of our body and the enormous changes taking place in it. Which leaves us often feeling quite insecure. We experience attraction to other people as we become part of certain friend groups. We turn away from the intimacy of

our parents and turn towards other forms of belonging. But, in our insecurity, every sign of not being accepted feels like the end of the world. We can't wait to belong to the grown-ups.

It is the time when we are trying our way into how to become responsible human beings.¹ We learn to deal with whatever we feel emotionally, in ways, that are acceptable to the world around us. Being vulnerable is looked upon as being weak. Being strong seems the embodiment of the ideal. Now, we have developed a personality, which enables us to survive in the world.

Being judgemental about ourselves and others has become 'normal' behaviour.

The price we pay for growing up

Lost along the way is the vulnerability, we are born with, which is still very close to our original sense of being unique. Our source. As we grow up, we must develop the many different parts of our personality to protect and hide the vulnerable child within.

Consequently, we also lose contact with our innocence.

Deeply hidden inside, however, the Inner Child energy does not get lost. We experience it to a large extent as an undefined, but nevertheless profound, longing in our heart. A longing for connection. A longing for being truly close to our loved ones. To be recognised, understood, and accepted for who we truly are. Intuitively we seem to vaguely remember that we came from unity. To become whole again, we guess we must return to unity. But how?

All judgments about ourselves and others are fed by our parents, teachers, peers, politics, religion, etc.

During all our childhood years, we have heard countless remarks that were meant to correct our behaviour. When we cried, we were lovely hushed. Nevertheless, we often picked up the unspoken message that our crying is disturbing or annoying. When we began to crawl, we regularly were stopped to protect us from hurting ourselves. Which we every so often understood as, "exploration can be dangerous. Better be safe than sorry." When we were exuberant, excited, and loud, we were told to behave and be quiet, thus tempering our enthusiasm and passion for life. The examples are endless. In the end, we more or less adjusted to the rules and regulations of the family we grew up in to belong. Or we protested against those rules and became rebels.

In both cases, this may result in living a life full of opinions about ourselves, other people, and about the world in general. Opinionated views that separate us from our real self and create distance between ourselves and others. Beliefs about how we and others *should* be and *should* behave. Judgmental standpoints that we will defend at all costs.

We study, find a job, make a life for ourselves, we marry and maybe get children. But, if we don't break the chain of all the stories, we tell ourselves. The stories we learned to believe about ourselves, others, and the world in general, will keep us looking in the wrong places to find peace and fulfilment.

Our job can earn us enough money, the house and the car can be beautiful and fast enough, our life may look mighty successful, it won't be really satisfying when secretly we are still comparing it with how we think it should be.

As we become ever more skilled in judging, even without noticing we are doing it, we lose our natural capacity of being in a state of appreciation and gratitude.

¹ See Michael Brown, The Presence Process

Who are we really underneath all of this?

Some questions are too big and deep to be answered in words.

From time to time, we spontaneously experience a glimpse of an answer of who we really are, when we are deeply moved by the look in someone's eyes. By an amazing sunset or the grandeur of a mountain view. By a small child that, still uninhibited by any judgmental thoughts about you, stretches his arms towards you, totally open to receive you, and give you his love. By falling in love and feeling completely accepted for who we are.

Those are moments when we aren't in any way hindered by thoughts, because what we experience in a flash, carries the truth of what we always have been longing for.

A truth about connection that spans the distance we feel within ourselves. A personal distance we all created by giving names and words to people and things around us, and thus losing the capability of experiencing the world in a felt sense, the way we were born.

Using Breathwork, we can get a sense of who we truly are, by breathing consciously and connectedly, moving us from thinking in our heads back into our body, into the here & now. The beauty of arriving fully in the body, in this here & now is, that there is no space left for judgmental thinking.

Conscious Connected Breathing

The moment we consciously connect our breathing, we move, from thinking about the past or the future, into the present moment.

Because the mind is programmed to think – new research shows, we think about 6000 thoughts per day! - concentrating on your connected breathing is an art worthy to be learned. It really pays off to be able to stop that mental noise, which is like a radio channel broadcasting non-stop, 24/7. Continuously commenting, having internal conversations, wandering thoughts, and incessantly judging what we hear, see, and feel.

In Breathwork, we will be guided to take conscious inhales, and to let the exhale happen without holding on to it, relaxing completely into it. In the beginning of a session, our mind will already be wandering off after two or three breaths. So, we need to bring our attention back to the quality of the inbreath, and the relaxation of the outbreath over and over again. After a while, this will produce a raising of the energy level inside the body, which will be fascinating in itself. This also will help to bring our attention totally in the present moment. The here & now, the only moment there is.

As human beings, we have a natural tendency to want to finish what we begin. To come to completion. Coming full circle.

Because the conscious breathing is also moving round, circularly, connecting the inhale to the exhale, it will allow what has not been completed in our life, not 'round', to be brought into our awareness. What comes up as thoughts, feelings, and emotions gets a chance to be experienced till it feels complete.

Living in a body, we experience life through our bodily senses. From birth onwards, events happen that are too painful to feel and experience fully. In order not to feel the pain, we interrupt the experience; we stop our breathing.

We block the experience in our minds, and we create a blockage in the body. Over the years, we train ourselves to control our breathing so that we don't feel too strongly what we don't want to experience.

We learn to suppress the unhappy moments. Because we have trained ourselves to cut our energy short, we also block out the more happy and joyful feelings; we can hardly stand the

amount of aliveness that goes with them, and often shut them out as well by holding our breath. It is a habit we learned well while growing up. How often have we been stopped in expressing our joy, our exuberance, our joy of life? We have become masters in suppressing feelings of any kind.

Because the connected breath produces a powerful connection between the body and the mind, between feeling and thinking, it is the tool 'par excellence' for helping us to dive into, and get insights about, these suppressed feelings.²

So, in a breathwork session, we use the breath to arrive in the present moment. We learn to feel our thoughts and be safe with whatever emotion arises inside. The consciously connected breath will heighten the release of endorphines in the blood, thus causing a slightly altered state of consciousness, which helps us to step more easily over the threshold to former hidden memories.

A session

In this session a client describes here, he was continuously reminded to breathe connectedly. This supported him to handle and breathe into the strong emotions he was feeling. His tears could flow, as well as his energy, sustained by his breathing rhythm. The emotions were released and integrated. The insights he had, were not only his mind understanding, but also his body grasping the original truth about himself.

Onno's session as he wrote it down afterwards.

My theme for today: I experience stress in my daily working life.

However, stress is fear, so the real question is: what are you afraid of?'

I have difficulty with what I perceive to be the fluctuating and unreasonable emotional communication of Ivo, my boss, who is also a friend of mine. In the moments in question, I can deal with this and bear it well. But am I completely clear? What sticks? I experience the feeling that I am walking on eggshells. "What happens when I send this e-mail?" 'Do I get a positive response?' 'Do I get a terribly unreasonable reaction back?' 'Is he right?'

The emotional consequence is anger, sadness, and fear. 'Am I good enough?'

At first, under Tilke's guidance, I come to my child, my baby. The child that has no words yet and gauges my parents' reaction, 'Am I good enough?' The child that always became silent in his father's arm. I always feel an intense connection with my father. I don't have to pretend to be better than my father. In other words, with my father I always feel good enough.

During this session the child lies in my own arms, and I tell him he is absolutely fine the way he is.

And for a moment, as an adult, I make the mistake of telling the child that, in order to keep that feeling, he has to learn a few lessons. But this child doesn't need that at all.

Tilke: 'This child is exactly right as he is, he doesn't need to change. This aspect of your Inner Child will never get older.'

This will always remain my child, an important part of me. My own access to my vulnerability, my access to my true self.

² Platteel-Deur, Tilke, *What is Breathwork-Practice and Spirituality?* THB Vol.1 no.1, Jan.1999

From Tilke I understand that, when my boss speaks angrily towards me or my colleagues, distance is created. Distance between himself and his own vulnerability, distance between the people around him and himself. In that fierce angry communication, there simply can be no contact. Will he feel lonely? I am convinced of it.

In the gratitude that I express every day driving my car, I am always grateful for the sensitivity that my friend and boss has inside of him. This gratitude (and everything else I am grateful for) softens my working day even before I have started it.

However, there is always a snag, 'Now I'm falling through the cracks', 'I'm not as good as they think I am', 'I don't really have any talent' etc. Do I get this back from others around me? No, not from the people around me. Even after a very positive feedback moment, it still sticks, this inner uncertainty.

Tilke asks, 'Who does Ivo represent to you? Listen to what first pops up in your mind.' 'Oscar', I answer.

It's my teacher at the youth theatre school, who really got to me when I was 17 or 18. He made remarks like, 'People with such straight hair are ugly, I hate people with straight hair.' 'Please, comfort the child', Tilke says. And in that moment, I realise that I really have no idea how to go about it. Why? Because I have come to believe what Oscar told me. That I am ugly. That I'm no good.

The comfort I can now give myself and my Inner Child is not in comforting words, but in just accepting and carrying the sadness. Realising that I have made the mistake of believing that this is who I really am: ugly.

A rage arises in me, a strong wrath. I feel it as an intense surge of energy in the body.

Tilke says, 'Judgement is something we are taught. In our childhood, without words, we just accept everything as it is.'

When we learn to talk, we create distance for the first time: this is me, that is the table. The next step we learn is, that's a nice table. However, once we hit ourselves, it can become, that is an ugly, stupid table.

When I echo Tilke's words out loud, it hurts. To say that something is ugly gives me a painful sensation. Like a knitting needle poking vertically into my sternum. As if the canal, through which I can breathe so cleanly, is suddenly filled with something acidic. Ouch. I realise that, in the grandeur of the universe, the distance we have from the things around us is not great at all. In fact, aren't we just one? Isn't it true that I am actually hurting myself by judging the things around me in this way?

The fact that we learn to judge, that something is ugly or not good, creates distance from who we really are.

I believe that this is an essential in breath-work; we reduce the created distance and reunite us with our true self. That, which we can never put into words

Conclusion

When I started writing this article, I remembered Bruce Reid, my first teacher in Gestalt therapy. *Thank you again for your wisdom and support.* The group we worked in, took place in a centre near central Station in Amsterdam.

This was one of our assignments.

We had to walk the streets, noticing when we were having those internal comments about people we were passing.

And then, we had to correct that internal judgmental thought with this sentence, consciously uttered to ourselves. *'I am sorry for judging you. Just like me, you are only seeking to be accepted, loved, and cherished. Just like me, you want to be able to express who you really are.'*

It was, and still is, a very effective exercise. An exercise I still need to practice!

I may remind myself time and time again, to be conscious about the quality of my thoughts. I can ask myself, 'How can I see the gift in everything that is happening in my life?' 'What is the lesson to be learned?'

I may remember that anger, fear, and sadness are not to be judged, but to be felt through until integrated.

I have to remind myself to practice being consciously grateful and in a state of appreciating my life in general.

Remember to remember to breathe consciously, cleaning up inside, thus creating more self-confidence, which diminishes the need to be judgmental. Not to react, but to respond.

Breathing and being in the here and now, quieting the unnecessary mental noise inside.

Learning the difference between the mind and the present moment.

Understanding how the mind lives in the past, which is over and gone. This present moment that is true, that is now, and the gateway to who we are.

Remembering we are meant to become more open, to love, and give love. And being aware about and respecting all the others -who are just like me- on their way to rediscover who they truly are.

In the end, there is no other way to return to inner peace and joy. Our personal inner peace will eventually help to create more peace in the world.