

WHAT IS THE BURNING ISSUE?

In every session I give or receive, it is always the same question; 'What is the burning issue?' An issue or an upset, which came up as a more or less disturbing moment in daily life is brought into the session. But as we begin to look into it, deeper layers of inner discomfort become visible.

However, we are never upset for the reason we think. We need to understand, that what we *think* to be the reason for our upset, mostly lies under the surface, deeply hidden in our early years.

In order to deal with what we then perceived as a hurtful or threatening experience, we formed certain behaviours as survival mechanisms. Even, if our behaviour today is very impractical and often even useless, we now are convinced it being unavoidable, valid, and based in truth. However, this is just our perception, a perception that was fabricated in the mind, based on those early imprints, and may therefore have no relationship with what happened in that long ago reality.

As our perception is always filtered through beliefs and childhood experiences, how we perceive a situation is not necessarily *the* truth or *the* reality.

Furthermore, we can never be sure that the past has been exactly the way we think it was, or if we just made it up to fit our basic belief systems.

We could say that underneath an upset, there is a hidden judgment about ourselves, others, or a situation, a judgment which has been formed early in life.

Vulnerability & Strength

Our birth is stored as a memory in the body/mind and in the heart.

Because we are born into this world in a small helpless baby body, being in constant need of being taken care of, our first experience in life is a very vulnerable one.

This vulnerability, felt as the energy of the Inner Child, is still very close to our original sense of uniqueness, of who we truly are. As such, the Inner Child energy is the doorway to our Essence.

In order to survive in this world, however, we need to develop stronger parts in our personality that are capable of protecting the vulnerable Inner Child. We learn to hide our vulnerability behind a certain power.

Being identified with weakness or victimhood is not the same as being aware of our vulnerability.

Being identified with power is not the same as being conscious of true strength. Becoming conscious about the tension between these two opposite energies, power and vulnerability, is crucial to inner growth.

Awareness of our vulnerability is actually the foundation of inner strength.

It opens our sensitivity and enables us to being truly intimate with ourselves and others. It's the key to close and warm relationships.

Basic beliefs

Forty-five years of working as a therapist and trainer, have shown that every human being has some very basic beliefs about themselves and life.

'I have to do it alone, but I cannot.' 'I am not good enough.' 'I am not worthy.' 'I am not lovable.' 'It's not safe.' 'I feel guilty'. 'What am I doing here?'

These beliefs are so deeply ingrained into our psyche, that we are mostly unconscious of them. Nevertheless, they influence our behaviour and our reactions to other people.

Since our *fear* number 1 is being rejected, we will do anything to avoid that kind of experience. We attempt to evade conflict. Trying something new will feel risky. Changes may be threatening.

Because our *need* number 1 is being accepted, seeking people who agree with us, may be one of our tactics to feel safe.

We all learn to seek the short-term payoff of feeling some calm, ease, and relief, by not taking a risk and so avoiding rejection. However, in the long run we then live life flattened by our addiction to a false sense of security.

When someone treats us in a way that touches an old unresolved hurt within us, we think we can wrap it up in a little package and hide it somewhere deep inside. The truth is that after we have accumulated many similar packages, somehow, they will begin vibrating within us to draw our attention and finally they will need to be unwrapped, acknowledged, and appreciated for what they truly are: Pieces of ourselves that needed to be seen and heard all along, finally belonging to us to make us whole again.

Likewise, we may keep searching for more joy and fulfilment outside ourselves, evading the task of being responsible for our own well-being and happiness.

A client lately said at the end of her session, *"By looking for something outside myself, I am not even nowhere near to what it is really about, me being always the cause of my own feelings."*

If responsibility is about being able to respond in an adequate way to a given situation, then it boils down to being responsible for ourselves in all aspects of our life.

Our past may be considered to have been bad or good. It doesn't matter. We must stop using the past as an excuse for our feelings or our behavior today.

We are responsible for our reactions now, to whatever may have happened to us in the past. We are responsible for the quality of our experiences *now*.

So, fundamental issues are always circling around vulnerability, inner worthiness, our right to be here, our doubt of being good enough, and the big question; 'What am I doing here?'

The benefit and beauty of the conscious connected breath

The moment we put our attention on our breathing, it stops being just the movement of air in and out of the body. The breath in itself is completely neutral. Conscious connected breathing however will reveal how our thoughts, our convictions and emotions effect our experience.

When we consciously take an inbreath through the nose, really feeling how the air travels upwards in our nostrils, noticing the space between our eyebrows where a tiny movement happens, where air seems to change into energy, observing how that energy can be pulled through our head, passing our thoughts, reaching high up into the sky...

And then, letting the air rush out on the outbreath and at the same time, becoming aware how the energy we took in can stay in the body, gently streaming down and down, grounding us in the basis of the body, in the pelvic floor...

Followed by the next wonderful inbreath on its way to our lungs, connecting us with an energy that may begin to let us experience what concentrated mindful breathing can reveal about us.

That is... if a random thought hasn't yet captured our attention away from our breathing. That is, if we could keep our attention just on the feeling of the air and the energy moving through us.

Our thoughts are likely to distract us in the beginning of a conscious breathing session. The mind will try everything to divert us from being concentrated on our breathing rhythm. It often feels as if -for a short moment- we have been daydreaming and are suddenly coming back to our senses. But if we keep watching the breath, it will show us exactly where we keep tension in the body, where an emotion is located, where we try to avoid what is going on inside.

The key is, keeping our attention on our breathing, accepting our mind trying to divert us, and then gently bringing our attention back to the next inbreath and accept whatever we feel physically and emotionally.

That seems easy but very often it takes some time.

By now, being distracted by thoughts, we might also go through all kinds of feelings. It might be fear we are not doing it right, that we have to try harder. Or the feeling we must hurry, or we cannot breathe because our chest feels tight. Our breath will show us precisely where we are holding back.

We use the conscious connected breath with the intention of healing, with the intention of clearing out the negative, life-denying thoughts we carry within ourselves.

Our breath will contact our vulnerability, which is an essential part of us. In our vulnerability we are closest to our true nature. Our vulnerability is the key to our deepest inner self, to who we really are in our own peculiarity. It is the space where we can meet ourselves past our thoughts and past our feelings.

It is also the space where we can retrieve our being good enough, our worthiness, and our self-love. It is the place where we deeply know we are innocent.

Whatever we encounter as an experience in life, and the same goes for a breathwork session, is valid. It is important because it is there. Do not try to change or to stop it. Don't run away from it. If we truly experience what is there, feel into it, listen into it, it eventually will change by itself. The consciously connected breath will prevent us from identifying with the feeling, and save us from drowning in it.

We must learn the art of choosing to say "Yes" to what's happening, to whatever we're feeling instead of "No".

A *No* contracts us, shuts us down.

A *Yes* opens and expands us. A yes, as research shows, releases endorphins into the body.

That is where we expand and become totally present.

That is where joy happens naturally.

Nothing in life ever stays the same. Everything in life changes, just as every feeling or emotion will change. By feeling into what is happening, through to the very end, a feeling will digest and integrate. It will lose its charge.

In life we are sometimes present in the here and now and other times, we will just feel lost in our experience, which most often might be terrifying.

Being sad is just what is when we feel it. Being angry is just that, feeling anger. Trying to not be sad or angry because that would be more "spiritual", is not being with what is in the moment. That would be avoiding what is. There is no good or bad here. One emotion is not

better or more important than the other. However, the truth is, we are safe, we are lovable, we are good enough.

In the end, underneath fear, anger or sadness, love is to be found.

In a breathwork session, the secret is to not let ourselves be distracted by whatever happens. Bringing our attention back to the breathing rhythm will eventually initiate the moment that we become truly present in the here and now, where the need to discerning between so called good or bad feelings stops.

The conscious connected breath activates the observer in us and teaches us to feel safe within the body, no matter what we are feeling. It teaches us not to drown in our emotions but to be present feeling them.

The conscious connected breath shows us that we truly are the connection between heaven and earth. It also reveals that what links heaven and earth inside of us is the heart.

Because we have lost our natural ability to feel wide and unrestricted, the expanding of our energy during a breathwork session can be overwhelming, which might cause us to contract our energy again. Or it might seduce us to be so fascinated by the experience that we try to hold on to it. The secret is to keep breathing consciously, connectedly, and consistently without striving for a special outcome.

Just being with the breath, sensing what is, being fully in the moment, is enough to guide us back to who we truly are, which is love.

Being in the moment in daily life

A normal day is always filled with many opportunities to choose how to think about oneself, the world, the political situation, and whatever else is happening in life.

During this last year of Covid, some people choose to react negatively, getting irritated about having to wear a mask, making the government wrong and so spending a lot of time in a state of upset, complaining about the rules. They seemed completely unconscious about being identified with a part inside that is convinced to know it all and wants to be right.

Others just take notice of the regulations, and although they too may have a different opinion, choose to simply do as they were told, not wasting any energy on resistance, and getting on with their lives.

During an EST training in Los Angeles in 1981, there were very many strict rules. Every day we were told, *"Keep your souls/soles in the room, follow the instruction and take what you get."* That is what is needed in life; we stay present as good as possible, we do what is asked from us, and then we fully experience what life presents us with.

E.g., if we feel upset about something being said or happening to us and we react to it, we will often try to defend ourselves or convince the other person of being wrong.

To respond to such a situation would mean, we first feel our upset inside. We don't try to change or understand it. We don't try to run away from it or kill the feeling. We just feel it.

We take care of what is going on inside. It's our choice to share about it or not.

It is the difference between reacting and responding. It is taking responsibility for the quality of the experiences in our life. It is deeply understanding we are always the cause of what we are feeling.

The need to explain and share what is happening within, is often only the need of the inner child to be noticed and heard. My first Gestalt teacher would tell us, *"If you hear yourself beginning to talk about your session, stop and talk about the weather or an ashtray instead"*.

This taught me to contain myself inside and wait till I could feel I had fully received the learning, hidden in the experience.

Also, the retelling of a traumatic experience over and over again, might make us look interesting. However, what that retelling of the 'story' certainly will do is, changing the actual memory of it as well as reinforcing the original trauma. The story isn't important. Feeling the feeling, moving through and into it will eventually integrate the old hurt.

Integration won't happen if we resist the experience that needs to be integrated.
Consciousness decreases when we resist the experience of what is.
Consciousness expands when we are willing to experience what is.

The power of Forgiveness... Releasing the Past

All the inner work we do steers us towards more awareness, and more presence. The breath helps us to come back to this here and now, which is the only moment there is. It brings the focus into the body and enables us to have felt perception of what is happening instead of a thinking knowledge.

When our consciousness is truly rooted in this here and now, we may think about the past and there will be no emotional pain any longer. It feels calm, peaceful, and light. There is no need to retell our life story anymore.

Our experience - whatever it may feel like – will be grounded in gratitude.

If we are not grateful simply for the fact that we are alive, we have fallen out of the here and now and landed in past or the future. We feel trapped in yesterday or tomorrow and miss out on the authentic physical and emotional moment that is happening right now. We try to grab something instead of receiving what has always and forever been there for us in the first place. Gratitude washes us clean of the illusions from the past.

As long as we feel righteous being angry, holding on to grudges and resentments about our past, we are trapped in the past. Resentment keeps us trapped in unclear relationships and it prevents us from being in the here and now. It keeps us away from inner peace. Resentment and bitterness change our hearts and minds and therefore the way we look at the world. It affects how we behave and who we are. If we allow people who we think have hurt us, to remain trapped in the role of the perpetrator, they are still the winners. That is a heavy burden to carry.

Forgiveness in connection with the connected breath is a way out of this prison.

To clean a room, we must look at the dirt. To forgive we have to look at the old hurts. There is no way around it. We must go through, in order to go inside, where we can feel and find a place of forgiveness. Only forgiveness will heal the past.

The past is just what it is, the past. Full stop.

Forgiveness is a gift to ourselves. It is the power that frees us from the chains of hatred and resentment. Forgiveness is ultimately the willingness to recognize that I have judgements about something. - *Forgiveness is giving up the desire that the past should be different than it was.* - ¹Oprah Winfrey

¹ Oprah Winfrey, *in a TV talk*

When we forgive, we feel relieved. The burden falls off us. Sometimes our bitterness is so great that we don't want to forgive yet. That's OK. Forgive yourself for not being ready. You don't have to forgive, you can...

Conclusion

The 'Course in Miracles' says that there are basically only two emotions: love or fear.

It says: - *There is no order of difficulty in miracles. One is not 'harder' or 'bigger' than another. They are all the same. All expressions of love are maximal.* - ².

The experiences in my work have led to the conclusion that this is also true for traumas.

There is no order of difficulty in traumas. One is not 'harder' or 'bigger' than the other. They are all the same. All expressions of fear, anger or sadness are maximal.

Fear, anger, and sadness, feelings that constantly weigh down our emotional body, are the result of us having to suppress our true nature in the past, which was necessary to grow up and learn to deal with the world as an adult. These feelings belong to our inner child and are desperately waiting to be felt and integrated.

Just as we would attend to a crying baby, we must learn to attend to the vulnerable child within. The innocent child is to be found right underneath the surface.

With love, acceptance, and appreciation a safe space will be created to re-experience the old hurts from the past and heal them, which is what integration means.

When fear, anger, and sorrow are truly experienced, what will re-surface is love.

When we keep clearing ourselves from old debris in our psyche, the awareness about our purpose in life, will expand.

Through intention, attention, and perseverance we will experience the loving truth that we were never separated, that in the depth of our being we are whole.

In the end, it is the love that heals.

² A Course in Miracles. *Text, Chapter 1, The meaning of Miracles.*