

# INNER PATHWAYS TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

STORIES OF PERSONAL SHIFT AND  
MINDFUL LIVING ON THIS PLANET





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MINDFUL LIVING ON THIS PLANET**

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# INNER PATHWAYS TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

## ABOUT US

We are a group of trainers, facilitators and educators specialising in informal education methods, with diverse backgrounds including activism, community leadership and research, to name just a few. We represent 7 organisations from 6 European countries. There is a great variety of skill and experience in our team and a richness of theoretical inspirations.

What unites us is a common vision for a better world, a sustainable future where

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**WHAT UNITES  
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HARMONY WITH  
ALL LIFE**

humanity can thrive in harmony with all Life. We believe that a transition to such a future is possible, and that an inner transformation is its key component. This volume contains stories of our own inner pathways: the practices, tools and experiences that shaped us and guided us on our individual journeys. They have become our anchors and passions, often leading to significant lifestyle changes or supporting concrete actions towards a sustainable future. At the back, you will find a list of references for further reading, if you wished to familiarize yourself in more depth with a particular method or theory.

In this introductory chapter, we outline the essence of our common approach and vision: a unifying thread, which runs through all of our stories.

## A VISION FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORLD

We came together at this pivotal moment in human history, driven by a recognition of a profound transformation that is needed in the world today. We are deeply concerned with the overexploitation of the Earth's resources, climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity. We join those voices in the world today that call for a shift towards building a society that sustains life, respecting the intricate natural balance on which we depend for our survival.

We feel encouraged to witness the increasing awareness of global environmental challenges, with more and more people around the world rising up, speaking up and taking action: from the smallest changes in daily routines, to the big transformative work restructuring the very fabric of our societies. We stand with those who believe that we still have a window of opportunity to act and restore the natural balance on our planet.

### THE INNER PATHWAYS APPROACH

We believe that as educators and facilitators we have important gifts to contribute to this global transformation. Our approach is that of INNER PATHWAYS: we believe that a shift in awareness is necessary to power and support the transition towards a sustainable future. This shift moves us away from a sense of separateness, alienation and competitive individualism, which led humanity into engagement in behaviours based on self-interest and overexploitation of natural resources.

Instead, this shift in awareness brings us back to a sense of interconnectedness of all life, which in turn promotes cooperation, care and respect. We believe that from this change in awareness, sustainable, lasting solutions will grow organically, in a ripple-like effect. We find from our own experience that the inner change finds manifestation

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VOICES IN THE  
WORLD TODAY  
THAT CALL FOR A  
SHIFT TOWARDS  
BUILDING A  
SOCIETY THAT  
SUSTAINS LIFE**



in the outer world, with profound effects beyond the individual wellbeing – healing relationships, workplaces and communities. We trust that it has the power to eventually bring about peace and harmony on a global level.

## THE PROCESS OF RECONNECTING

Our approach is based on practices that aim to reconnect people to themselves, nature and each other, bringing a realisation that we are an inseparable part of the natural world, deeply connected to other beings.

This process of reconnecting relies on continuous re-sourcing and re-charging. It is not something that can be done

### **PRACTICES THAT AIM TO RECONNECT PEOPLE TO THEMSELVES, NATURE AND EACH OTHER**

just once, or accepted as “truth” on a purely intellectual level. Instead, the awareness of interconnectedness of all life is a continuous process of re-remembering, deepening our sense of connection, strengthening our inner power and replenishing our energy to act. It relies on tapping into the intelligence that lies beyond our thinking minds and includes the wholeness of human experience. It is an

embodied process that leads us to a profound lifestyle change.

We recognize that there is not a single path for everyone to follow. As the old proverb says: “There are hundreds of paths up the mountain, all leading to the same place, so it doesn’t matter which path you take.” We hope that this book will provide some inspirations and useful practices for your further journey.



DEBORA T. STENTA

# CHILDBIRTH AND RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILDREN AS INNER PATHWAYS TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

*Connecting to the first period of human life, from conception through pregnancy, childbirth, primal care, and all the way to parenting and growing up with children, invites a deep exploration of our wilderness and a step towards the evolution of an ecological society.*

*“The solution of the conflict between mankind and planet Earth depends on the way Homo evolves. Homo Superpredator must eventually be overtaken by Homo Ecologicus, characterised by a propensity to unite and establish a global awareness, and also by an ability to develop a fundamental respect for Mother Earth. Finally the most urgent problems Humanity has to face are all related to different aspects of the capacity to love. The period surrounding birth appears as the critical link in the chain of events on which it is possible to effectively act. It is also the critical link that all known societies have routinely disturbed”*

*(Source: [Odent, 1979](#))*

*The converging crises of our time all arise  
from a common root that we might call Separation.  
Taking many forms – the human/nature split,  
the disintegration of community,  
the division of reality into material and spiritual realms –  
Separation is woven into every aspect of our civilization.  
It is also unsustainable: it generates great and growing crises  
that are propelling us into a new era, an Age of Reunion.*

*Charles Eisenstein (Source: Eisenstein, 2011)*

It all began in the Swiss hospital where I was vacuum extracted from my mother. The story is long, and it goes through a lot of deep healing processes... I used to be a city girl with an academic education. As a child, I was told the widespread narrative about childbirth that we all know; it is risky, painful, dangerous. I saw it as the Big Separation, as many people particularly thinkers, consider it: a metaphor of how life is supposed to be hard and challenging from the very beginning. The same applied to the so-called "education" that even I myself was conducting – I had introjected the usual ideas about children needing to be directed, obey, disturb adults' lives as little as possible.

All this, until I eventually gave birth with my own forces. This event was a rebirth for me, a real shamanic journey that completely transformed my life. After this initiation, I started seeing birth as the Big Reunion, a possibility for humans to restore our integrity.

While growing up with children, I could observe what my birth experience had already taught me, and I just could not help but naturally flow with the process as it was spontaneously unfolding.

I could observe that our bodies are mammalian. They react, feel, move according to primal instincts and needs.

I could witness that children are born untamed. They come into the world with the same illiterate wisdom that belongs to wild animals. Have you ever

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---

## **I GOT INSPIRED BY CHILDREN TO HEAL THE PART OF MYSELF THAT HAD LOST CONNECTION WITH THE WILDERNESS**

observed a deer, a buzzard, a snake in the wild? They are fiercely beautiful creatures without knowing it, naturally endowed with a sense of self-protection of their freedom, agile and strong, demure and open-minded, in total harmony with the unfolding of their existence.

Just like children.

Just like all of us when we came into the world, vibrating and working according to the original instructions.

I got inspired by children to heal the part of myself that had lost connection with the wilderness. I started carrying on my own “spiritual” practice of being in relationships with young humans both personally and professionally. What were and still are the most useful key factors to me? Observation, silence and listening, avoiding suggestions and solutions when I’m not asked for them, creating an atmosphere where people feel safe to express themselves, and trusting.

I observe women who give birth and children who are born. That this is a moment when we are the nearest to our mammalian state; birthing mammals need to feel protected and safe, they look for hidden and intimate places, they shy away from unknown looks, loud noises, excessive light, and they would never ever allow other beings to approach their newborns for quite some time.

The hormonal cocktail that is produced during labour and birth has the same composition of the one released when we make love. They are two consequent steps of our reproductive life that require similar conditions for intimacy, protection, privacy and surrender.

Michel Odent describes Homo superpredator as affected by a form of weakened ecological instinct that can be considered as an alteration of the capacity to love. So the fundamental question is “How do we develop our capacity to love?” (Source: Odent, 2002)

The way we are welcomed into this world; the way a mother is supported to develop instinct to love her baby, the way adults can make children feel unconditionally right, valuable, worthy... These ways are shaping the whole

loving capability of humans, thus their wellness and health throughout their entire life, with virtuous consequences for the wellness and health of our Planet.

WHICH ACTIONS AND CHOICES CAN ENHANCE YOUR CAPACITY TO LOVE?

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR OWN BIRTH AND WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF ITS NARRATIVE? HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

HAVE YOU TRIED TO TRULY MEET A CHILD AS IF SHE OR HE WERE THE MOST RESPECTFUL GUEST VISITING YOUR HOME? IF NOT, TRY.



# UN-STUCK MY POTENTIAL

*How my body showed me a way out of a stuck-situation using a simple, but powerful embodiment exercise.*

*Social Presencing Theater (SPT) is an embodiment and social art practice, developed under the leadership of [Arawana Hayashi](#), for understanding current reality and exploring emerging future possibilities. SPT can be practised at the individual, group, organization, and larger social systems level. It is not “theatre” in the conventional sense, but uses simple body postures and movements to dissolve limiting concepts, to communicate directly, to access intuition, and to make visible both current reality, and the deeper – often invisible – leverage points for creating profound change.*

*Social Presencing Theater is connected closely to the widely known model for transformative change; Theory U. The Presencing Institute at the MIT university in Boston has used SPT effectively for over ten years in business, government, and civil society settings, in places including Brazil, Indonesia, China, Europe and the United States.*

The usual pattern to deal with stuck situations in my life has for the longest time been to think them through, discuss them with family or friends, and then reflect on them. It works, by its (my?!) own logic, as I would often get an idea of how to overcome the stuck and what to do next.

Some stucks though, return.

One of my returning (life) stucks could be called, “Need for harmony and conformity.” This has presented itself to me in a variety of ways and forms such as; difficulty in dealing with conflict situations or aggression for that matter,

clearly expressing my opinion in discussions, voicing irritation or proposing something unusual or unconventional. Some I have managed to turn around, some still return.

In the last years I have felt more than once, stuck, when it was about having the courage to integrate activities in my professional work that are still considered in some contexts, weird or even “esoteric.” Meditation, embodiment exercises, council for example, and although I had good reasons why they would be effective, cognitively I knew I *just* needed to do it in an authentic and considerate way. Still, more than once my body felt stuck and I could not *just* do it.

Through Social Presencing Theater (SPT) I got to know the embodiment practice “Stuck” SPT starts from the conviction that there is wisdom in the body that can be helpful in stuck situations, since every stuck has a physical manifestation. This exercise proposes to embody the stuck situation, or in other words, let your body find the shape of it. As one can easily imagine, these body shapes or sculptures are often unpleasant postures; for at the end of the day, it is a “stuck!”

Embracing this embodied stuck with full presence and slowness, one allows the body to begin movement toward a posture that is more sustainable, perhaps more pleasant than the *initial pose*. This second posture or shape is not “the solution” but *in the movement* therein, lies potential wisdom. And again, one should not look too quickly to make cognitive meaning of this experience; it works also without thinking on a somatic level.

So, how did it help me with my stuck? The last time I embodied my previously stuck situation something extraordinary happened. The initial shape was one slightly bent in the back facing more towards the floor with one hand reaching out and one hand in front of the face. My cognitive intelligence would tell me to straighten up my body, stand firmly and have a clear view forward. My body though, started to lean even more forward, kneel down and then slowly bring my hands to touch my heart area.

My witnessing colleagues noticed a relaxed posture and joyful face; and I truly sensed it. I felt soft and the words came to me; “I need to lean into my

**THERE IS WISDOM  
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MANIFESTATION**

## I NEED TO LEAN INTO MY VULNERABILITY

vulnerability”

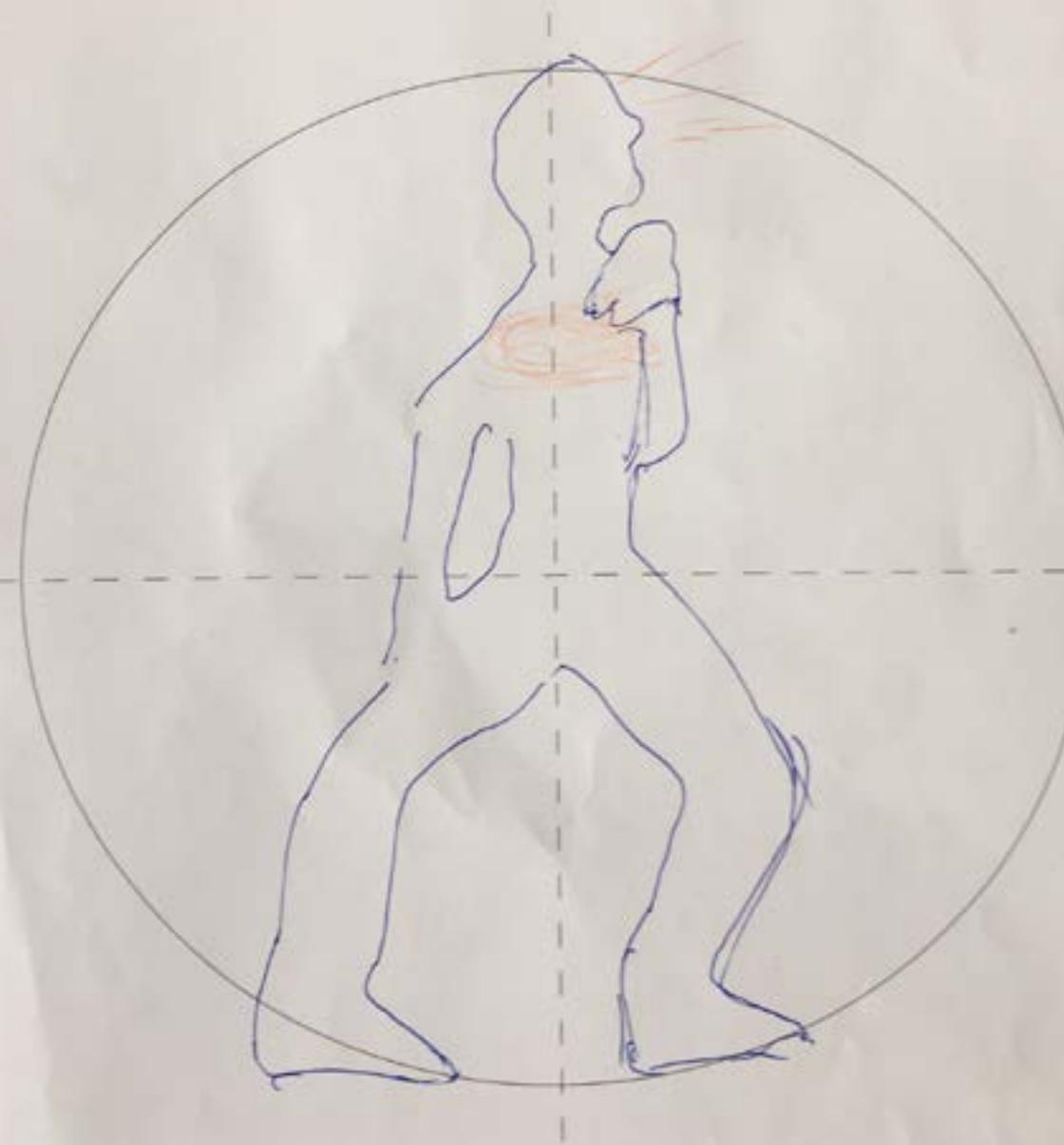
It really felt like a shift in my consciousness, and in the little time since then I can feel already that I am more at ease with proposing activities that I feel strongly about, even if they might be unusual or uncomfortable.

WHAT IS A STUCK SITUATION IN YOUR LIFE THAT RETURNS?

HOW DO YOU USUALLY DEAL WITH IT?

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO GIVE IT A SHAPE WITH YOUR BODY?

*using the articulated paper model  
draw your sculpture 2 inside the frame below*



# BRINGING MOVEMENT AND MEANING IN EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

*Integrating Body-based learning has been an educational trend in recent years and not surprisingly, for bringing the body back to in-depth experiential learning, offers amazing opportunities for the joy of moving.*

*Body-based learning means bringing awareness to the inner processes throughout each physical activity, whether it is pottery or volleyball. Using movement and observation, this learning brings forth conclusions about how you are, how you feel and how you relate to yourself, others or any given subject throughout movement. It brings with it the idea, that how you show up in one physical activity might give you a clarity on how you show up in other areas of your life.*

*We are living in conditioned bodies that are shaped by the cultural beliefs that surround us. Our bodies are influenced both by the amount and type of movement we do every day, by clothes we wear, furniture we use, beauty standards that we see and so on. Bringing awareness on how we might be influenced by all of these things, making a choice to be this or that, is the power that embodied learning can help to unlock.*

*To learn more, you can research work that [Wendy Palmer](#), [Paul Linden](#) and [the Strozzi institute](#) is undertaking, as well as study various embodiment modalities yourself and see how they inform about the way that you are. As in embodiment "How we done one thing, we do everything"*



I was not a sporty child. Throughout my early life, I dreaded physical activities due to the numerous times I was seen trying and failing in my experience with school sports classes, so embarrassing and alienating for me as a child of that age. I ended up avoiding classes, which influenced both my health and self-image, and how I related to my body. Those days, I could not have imagined that in the future, my very working day would be spent teaching movement classes

for adults. I guess this was a choice made also out of rebellion, to recreate an experience of physical exercise that actually brought more inclusion, joy and playfulness, lifting people up, instead of focusing on their inabilities. Further, I found myself studying yoga and acroyoga as well as learning to relate to human bodies through the subtle art of touch-massage. For me, another reason to be attracted to these bodywork modalities, was my own inability to find wellness in life and the observation that many social-change workers suffered from burn-out and conflicting relationships with themselves and others.

A few years into the practice, I started to ask myself the question, *how can I bring some of those beneficial principles into an education for social change?* As a result, and with a colleague of mine, we began working on the concept of body-based learning. Here, we could experiment with how to blend movement, meditation and hands-on work with the body, with the educational topics of leadership, peacebuilding, creativity, change-making and so on. And I must admit that these became some of the most impactful courses because they tackled something deeper and beyond our thinking, our being, by exploring the ways we relate to our bodies. For example, how we read and perceive the bodies of others, what boundaries we set and protective walls that we build to be able to go through this life, what deeply set beliefs we hold about ourselves and the world we live in, and how the body is a wonderful true friend to explore ways of being and build new ways of perceiving.

And so there are many ways to bring powerful work with the body into the business of social change. Back in 2010, while working with a pilot movement project in a women's prison, I witnessed many of the inmates being empowered by learning to stand in the warrior poses of yoga, and being softened by

**WE ARE LIVING  
IN CONDITIONED  
BODIES THAT ARE  
SHAPED BY THE  
CULTURAL BELIEFS  
THAT SURROUND US**

## THE FIRST LEARNING WE NEED TO DO, IS UNLEARNING

the bodywork sessions. I have seen burnt out change-workers finally spot the light after a dark period, not only starting to take care of their wellbeing, but becoming more effective at what they do for the World. I have seen so many beautiful faces burst into tears after having been seen and touched in a way that respects their boundaries, and cared for their wellbeing. It is truly powerful work.

And with its power, comes great responsibility. Body-based learning brings vulnerability and thus requires safe space for people to be able to express themselves and to be as they are. This also for facilitators to hold to the strong ethic of not overstepping somebody's boundaries, whether they are aware of them or not, always to offer choice to participate or withdraw.

It is time that we reclaim our power in respect of our bodies and be the only ones that make choices that concern our wellbeing. If there is one lesson I have learnt through embodied work, it is that the first learning we need to do, is unlearning. *Unlearning* that we are not beautiful, fit, tall, short, wide, enough etc. To know that our brain has the amazing capacity with its neuroplasticity to change and transform, not only that we can learn more skills and acquire knowledge, but also to learn a different way of seeing ourselves and the world we live in. Working with the body might be a powerful tool to start this process of change: from the inside out.

HOW HAVE YOUR FAMILY AND CULTURE SHAPED YOUR VIEW ABOUT YOUR BODY?

WHAT ARE THE JUDGEMENTS YOU MAKE ABOUT YOUR APPEARANCE OR PHYSICAL ABILITIES?

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE BODILY PRACTICES AND EXERCISE? HOW DO THEY HELP YOU TO BECOME BETTER AT CREATING CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE AND IN THE WORLD?



# TAKING CARE, NATURALLY

*How Certified Pure Therapeutic Grade ® (CPTG) essential oils can sustainably support us in reconnecting with “our” nature, and with being in harmony with nature around us.*

*Pure essential oils are a natural solution for the well-being of people and the environment in a sustainable way. They work best when taken constantly in small doses - a drop is enough - because they are able to reach every cell in our body via blood circulation, interacting with each cell's receptor and influencing its behaviour and function.*

*The properties of essential oils come through age-old wisdom that today is complemented by a growing body of scientific research that validates their powerful effects.*

*Information about pure, certified therapeutic grade essential oils, can be found at [www.sourcetoyou.com](http://www.sourcetoyou.com) and here [www.mydoterra.com/limina](http://www.mydoterra.com/limina).*

The plan with my colleagues for that Wednesday afternoon was to watch the docu-film, “Fire in the blood”, the story of struggle in fighting against HIV/AIDS and the trail between the South African *government* and the pharma lobby. Although I did not know the documentary, I did know the story, because I often used parts of it in simulation exercises for my work as a trainer in human rights education. My enthusiasm was not so high as I sat down to watch the movie begin.

It was a series of interviews with government officials, representatives from the pharma companies involved, victims of HIV/AIDS both rich and poor. With my values coming from an activist background, I was drawn into it with all my emotions, my belief that I was already doing enough. My entire body

felt oppressed, my person disempowered particularly by the cynicism presented in the movie and the suffering that it was causing in each of us.

“You may think this is a third world problem, but actually the high cost of medications is a growing problem for the first world welfare system...” This the closing sentence, was the last straw that catalysed a change in myself that had been maturing internally already for some time. I decided to explore how to empower myself and my immune system through the use of natural remedies, solutions for my well-being, the well-being of the people around me and for the world. Through my research I discovered that pure certified essential oils naturally interact with the biochemistry of my body, activating chemical reactions that lead to homeostasis. So I studied chemistry with passion, exploring how the brain and body interact with one another. I explored how the heart is sending signals, how the emotions are stored in our cells, and how the pure essential oils can enter into cells to influence their behaviour and function, creating an environment for healing physically and emotionally.

I discovered how different was the interaction in the body of natural molecules compared to the synthetic ones that we find in every product we use, the food we eat and that are toxic for our bodies.

**IN THIS JOURNEY  
I HAVE LEARNT  
TO TUNE INTO MY  
BODY, TO REALLY  
FEEL IT AND NOT  
JUST TAKE CARE  
OF IT ON AN  
OCCASIONAL BASIS**

In this journey I have learnt to tune into my body, to really feel it and not just take care of it on an occasional basis. I have learnt that sickness is an internal imbalance that one can brush aside very well with the power of our mind, especially with the idea of dismissing the signals that we dislike and that forewarn depletion in our performance, unfortunately then to lead us into high stress.

The practice and use of pure essential oils

**PURE ESSENTIAL  
OILS CAN ENTER INTO  
CELLS TO INFLUENCE  
THEIR BEHAVIOUR  
AND FUNCTION,  
CREATING AN  
ENVIRONMENT FOR  
HEALING PHYSICALLY  
AND EMOTIONALLY**

has brought me to appreciate even more of nature, its abundance and generosity and its regenerative power. It has brought me to understand the nature in me, that I am also nature and therefore intrinsically connected with the entire system around!

It has brought me to trust my regenerative power and the inner wisdom of my body.

TAKE A LEAF OF PEPPERMINT IN YOUR HANDS AND SQUEEZE IT. PAY ATTENTION TO THE SCENT AND FEEL IT IN YOUR BODY. IMAGINE THE SCENT REACHING EVERY CELL OF YOUR BODY... THIS IS ACTUALLY WHAT IS HAPPENING.

RECALL A MOMENT WHEN YOU FELT THAT YOUR MIND WANTED OR HAD DECIDED FOR SOMETHING, AND THAT YOUR HEART, OR GUT OR BODY, WAS SENDING YOU A DIFFERENT MESSAGE. HOW DID YOU FEEL AT THAT SPECIFIC MOMENT?

WHEN WAS LAST TIME THAT YOU WERE LISTENING FOR YOUR BODY SIGNALS AND DECIDED TO REALLY PAY ATTENTION TO THEM? WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS?



# TRANSFORMATIONAL POTENTIAL OF DANCE

*The embodied presence of conscious dance practice can transform how we feel and how we relate to the world around us by bringing more connection, awareness and creativity to our lives.*

*Conscious dance is a movement practice with no steps to learn or follow, no right or wrong way to move. The focus is on bringing awareness to the bodily sensations, breath, feelings, thoughts, habitual patterns and emotions. It is a meditation in movement, designed to support a deeper presence of the experience of the here and now, from moment to moment. A variety of world music is especially selected to catalyse movement and support depth of the experience.*

*There are various modalities of conscious dance, including [5 Rhythms](#), [Movement Medicine](#), [Dance of Awareness](#), [DANCEmandal](#) and [Open Floor](#). [5 Elements Dance Activation](#) is one of the modalities brought together by Malaika Darville who has been my teacher and mentor since 2017.*

It's Wednesday evening and I am going to my weekly conscious dance practice. The space I arrive into feels welcoming and safe. Some people are already there, preparing, stretching or lying on the floor. Gentle music is inviting increasing stillness into my body. I take off my shoes and feel the soles of my feet touching the warm wooden surface of the floor. We are guided to take few minutes to arrive, the invitation to slow down, notice and connect with the breath. Gradually, I become more and more aware of being inside my own skin. With eyes closed I am noticing subtle sensations, the flow of thoughts, muscle tensions, the heart beating, air flowing in and out, blood flowing in my veins.

The movement starts from within. I ask my body what it needs and I notice subtle inner impulses, to stretch out, to reach up, to bend down. I am aware of my breath and of each movement. The heart-beat slows down and with each in-breath, the body softens. Allowing this expression to flow through my body, I'm becoming curious as the body parts start to awaken. The more I listen to the body and allow the experience to be expressed, the more connected I feel. A gentle touch on my own skin brings comfort. Following the guidance from the skilled facilitator, I feel myself going deeper into the experience, dropping into my body in embodied meditation.

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**GRADUALLY,  
I BECOME MORE  
AND MORE AWARE  
OF BEING INSIDE  
MY OWN SKIN.**

Sometimes from this place, an inspiration, a reflection or an image comes: expression beyond words. A sense of liberation, authenticity and freedom overflows as I get out of my own way and allow my body to move. Over the next two hours I am on the journey with the breath, rhythm, movement and the elements of nature: Air, Earth, Fire, Water and Ether. Guided by the facilitator's soft voice and the variety of world music, we go from gentle, slow motion movements through stomping, shaking, and jumping with joy and passion, back to stillness. Exploring inner landscapes of my body I simply bring into the movement whatever is present in the moment. We are invited to take part in various exercises and share this experience with other dancers. This transforms the feeling of separateness and brings me to remember our universal, shared and common humanity.

This practice gives me a chance to fully express myself, without inhibitions

---

**THIS PRACTICE  
GIVES ME A CHANCE  
TO FULLY EXPRESS  
MYSELF, WITHOUT  
INHIBITIONS AND  
FEAR OF WHAT  
PEOPLE MIGHT  
THINK**

and fear of what people might think. Rooting the awareness in movement and breath allows my inner critic to soften. And this has given me the opportunity to get in touch with parts of myself that were inaccessible, hidden, brought greater joy, freedom, connection and awareness into my life. Just as the recent research is showing, dance can help develop and strengthen new neural connections, improving brain health; increasing levels of the feel-good hormone, serotonin.

**CONSCIOUS  
DANCE ALLOWS  
US TO ACCESS  
OUR EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE AND  
BODY WISDOM,  
AND OPENS THE  
WAY FOR NEW  
AND CREATIVE  
POSSIBILITIES.**

The way we show up in the dance is reflecting how we show up in everyday life. The dance floor is a safe space to notice and transform any habitual patterns, fixed notions and stuck emotions. Conscious dance, combining universal principles of embodiment, mindfulness and creative self-expression, allows us to access our emotional intelligence and body wisdom, and opens the way for new and creative possibilities. It can serve as a tool for empowerment and improving communication, as we become more comfortable with who we are and our unique expression. This practice is the embodied meditation that has a potential to catalyse

change from inside and cultivate a sense of peace within and around us.

DO YOU EXPERIENCE YOURSELF AS AN EMBODIED BEING? HOW DO YOU EXPRESS AND PERCEIVE YOUR EMBODIED SELF?

WHAT IS YOUR INNER EXPERIENCE WHEN YOU DANCE? CAN YOU RECOGNISE YOUR HABITUAL WAYS OF MOVEMENT?

HOW DOES CULTIVATING SENSITIVITY AND AWARENESS TO THE SUBTLE INNER SENSATIONS IN THE MOVING BODY SUPPORT THE FEELING OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS WITH THE WORLD?



# DISCOVERING THE WORK THAT RECONNECTS

*How to deal with the terror of environmental degradation and climate change news, with information about extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and wildfires spreading on a daily basis like... well, a wildfire? Is it possible to find courage and active hope amidst this global crisis?*

*“Coming back to life: The updated guide to [The Work that Reconnects](#)” by Joanna Macy and Molly Brown is one of the essential guidebooks for our times: a collection of group practices to assist us in navigating through this turbulent period in human history. These practices are designed to help us acknowledge and honour our grief, anger, fear and numbness as natural psychological responses to the current state of the world, as well as to deepen our connection to each other and nature. By doing so, they inspire us towards creative, meaningful action and purposeful life. [The Work that Reconnects](#) process consists of four components. We begin by deepening our sense of gratitude for the precious gift of life on Earth; strengthened by this experience, we can then move into acknowledging and honouring our pain for the world; we then try to see the world’s problems in new ways, e.g. through empathically connecting with the perspectives of others, including people who hold opposite views to us, the past and future generations, as well as other species. Equipped with these new ways of seeing, we gain more clarity regarding our individual, unique talents and skills that can contribute to building a sustainable civilisation and we begin to develop “active hope” While there are many teachings and inner pathways that can lead us to these realisations, [The Work that Reconnects](#) has played a particularly important role in my own journey.*

I know I will not be alone in saying that the current state of the world brings me down at times. While the human race has achieved amazing things - from walking on the Moon, through creating music and art, to carrying out heart transplants - we still have a lot to learn on how to respect and care for our natural environment and for one another. I have spent over a decade in the field of social sciences, trying to understand the problems that haunt our society and our planet. Over time, I became increasingly disheartened by observing how slow and reluctant we were to act, despite the mounting evidence that we're running out of time to halt the disastrous climate change. Instead, I saw us carry on with "business-as-usual", driving our world ever closer to the brink of extinction, while perpetuating immense suffering on countless species and people around the world.

Bit by bit, I began to realize that using the intellect to understand problems and propose alternative solutions was simply not enough to address this global challenge. Discovering *The Work that Reconnects* contributed to a profound shift in my perception regarding the widespread apathy and denial associated with the environmental crisis: I realised they were perfectly understandable reactions to the feelings of overwhelm. I began to see that working with emotions was key to ensuring a sustainable future and was inspired to re-engage with the problems of this world with a renewed sense of purpose and hope.

Shortly after first coming across Joanna Macy's writings, I had an opportunity to attend a series of *The Work that Reconnects* workshops during a gathering that brought together green activists, Buddhists and members of the public concerned with the state of the environment. Over the course of four days, we took part in practices from all four components of this approach. We began by reflecting on the evolutionary journey that brought us to this moment and on the strength, resilience and vulnerability of the human form, tapping into a sense of gratitude for being alive. I was then able to connect, for the first time with such clarity and intensity, with my grief, fear, despair, sadness and hope that I feel in relation to the environmental crisis - and to witness the emotions of others. This shared experience made a profound impression

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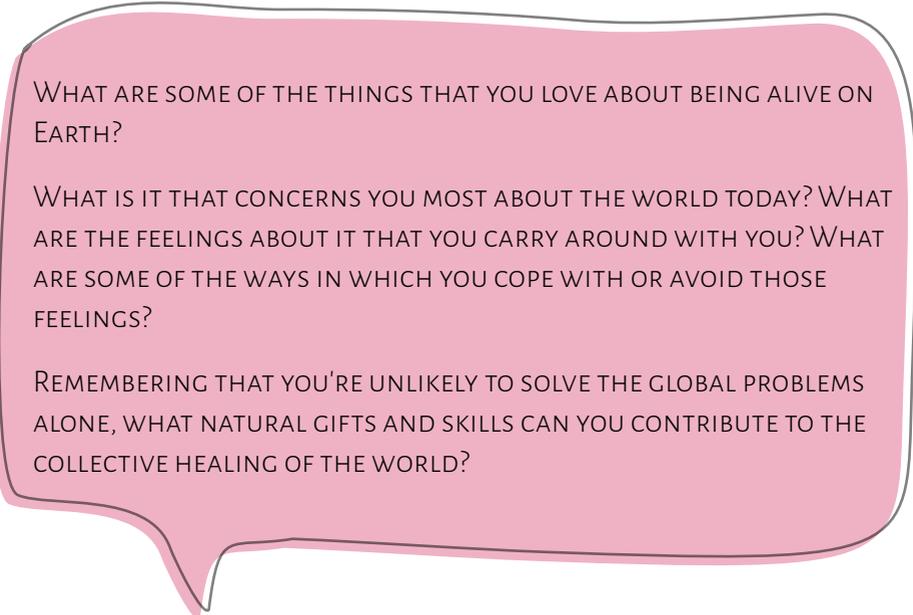
**WE STILL HAVE A  
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AND CARE FOR  
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AND FOR ONE  
ANOTHER**

**AS LONG AS  
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FULL POTENTIAL AS  
A HUMAN FAMILY**

on me, inspiring a sense of collective power. We then reflected on the perspective that future generations may take when they look back at this moment in history, which brought greater clarity and acceptance regarding the tasks put in front of us in this lifetime. Finally, we considered how we can use our individual talents and skills to contribute to the healing of the world.

The Work that Reconnects allowed me to feel a spark of renewed hope for the future: somewhere over the course of those four days, I realised that not all was lost. As long as we keep on connecting to ourselves, nature and each other during this time of crisis and transformation, we can begin to live up to our full potential as a human family endowed with self-reflective consciousness, taking our rightful place as guardians and protectors of

life on Earth. I am now passionate about sharing this work with others and each time I feel inspired by witnessing its healing and transformative power. These practices are also something I go back to whenever I feel “weighed down” by the problems of this world and I recall this experience whenever I find myself talking to others about the environmental crisis. Through compassionately acknowledging denial, fear, guilt or other emotional responses to this overwhelming challenge, we can begin to communicate in ways that inspire hope, rather than shutting people down. As Jane Goodall, the famous British primatologist, once said: “Only when our clever brain and our human heart work together in harmony can we achieve our true potential.”



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT YOU LOVE ABOUT BEING ALIVE ON EARTH?

WHAT IS IT THAT CONCERNS YOU MOST ABOUT THE WORLD TODAY? WHAT ARE THE FEELINGS ABOUT IT THAT YOU CARRY AROUND WITH YOU? WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH YOU COPE WITH OR AVOID THOSE FEELINGS?

REMEMBERING THAT YOU'RE UNLIKELY TO SOLVE THE GLOBAL PROBLEMS ALONE, WHAT NATURAL GIFTS AND SKILLS CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE COLLECTIVE HEALING OF THE WORLD?



# NATURE CONNECTION, TRANSFORMATION

*How my re-connection with nature guided me to re-connect with myself and the whole world.*

*Ecopsychology is a multidisciplinary area, it is a partnership of psychology and ecology that also integrates areas such as philosophy, system theory, anthropology, etc. It is seeking the answer to questions such as "What is the psychological answer to humans destroying their own habitat?" and offers a wider perspective to psychology, that is: we cannot be studied or healed separately from the whole of the planet.*

*Ecopsychology offers three insights: 1. There is a deeply bonded and reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. 2. The illusion of the separation of humans and nature leads to suffering both for the environment (as ecological devastation) and for humans (as grief, despair, and alienation). 3. Realizing the connection between humans and nature is healing for both. (Source: [www.soulcraft.co](http://www.soulcraft.co))*

*One of the aims of ecopsychology is to bring the suppressed ecological self (ecoself) to surface. The ecological self is the expansion of self to the natural world. We experience our ecological self when we sense a deep resonance with other species and a quality of belonging and connection to the larger ecological whole, a unity with the rest of the planet. We identify with the natural world when we experience commonality with it. The ecological self leads to environmentally appropriate behaviours, not out of a sense of self-sacrifice or self-denial but out of a sense of love and common identity. When we act from our ecological self, we do not have to try to make environmentally responsible choices. Instead, our choices are naturally less intrusive, more sensitive, less toxic because we appreciate the larger context and care about those well-being our behaviour affects.*



“Hello Evet, will you come to the Camino with me?” Asked my friend through the phone from a busy day at work. “Yes, sure!” I replied without thinking or having any idea of what the ‘Camino’ was. That was where the story of my shift began.

A pilgrimage followed, thirteen years ago walking 800 km through great adventures where fun, love and a future found me. Yet, the moment of conscious transformation came a few weeks later as I was walking the streets of my Hungarian birth town. Right out of the blue came the realization that I had been living a life that someone else had dreamed for me, and that I *have the right to live my own!* That was the second step of importance, a step that continued to lead on to further transformative moments; a journey that connected me back to the natural world in different ways.

About seven years later I participated in a training course that included a 24-hour solo in a forest. It was the first time that I'd spent hours in the same spot in nature for so long without having to do or achieve anything. It was cold so I spent most of the time in my sleeping bag or doing exercises; hugging trees, observing insects, listening to the sound of leaves in the wind and the strange noise the trees made as branches touched. Holding the trunks and feeling movement from the wind, I could also tune in, hear the birds and the whole forest. At night I woke up several times to watch the full moon, each time in awe as it moved forward across the sky. Not for a moment did I feel bored even though I basically felt nothing much actually happened. Only later as we shared our stories in the circle and received a mirroring from the facilitators did I realise the significance of this experience. It helped me to understand that I'd felt ‘One’ with the whole forest, that my unity with the whole world became clearly evident for me, just by being *out there*.

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This experience opened a deeper gateway for many more; from seeing the whole universe in fractals after noticing ants running up on the bark of a tree, noticing a green beetle ‘watching out for me’ before I slept, and then it flying away as I awoke, to the forest holding me as a mother in her womb, or

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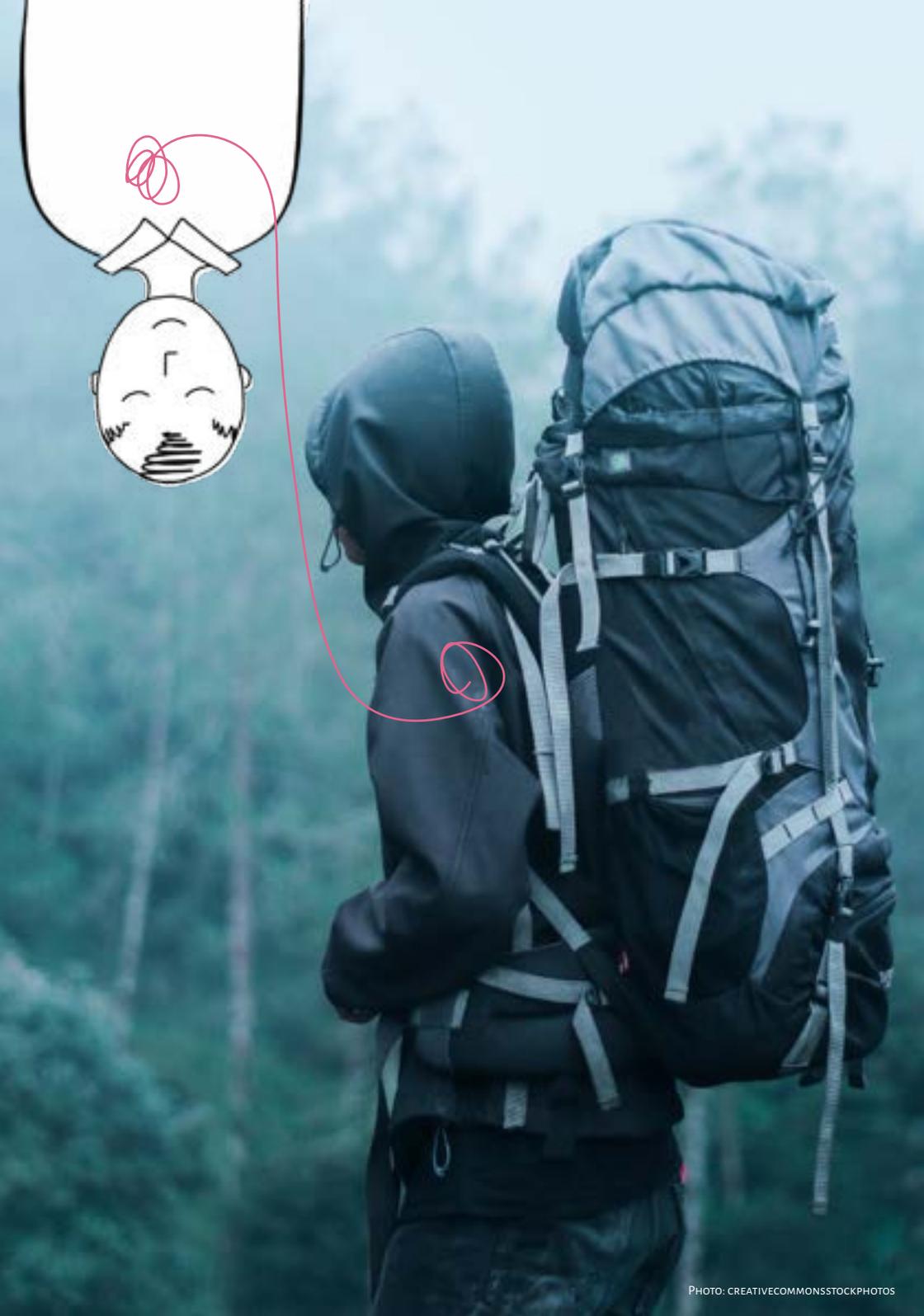
simply feeling welcomed, safe and happy as I hugged the tree at my sitspot.

All of these experiences remind me of the very first moment when the boundaries of my 'self' dissolved, and the idea of how we humans are part of the whole ecosystem whether we know it or not. And how did this change my life? It helped me to find my vocation; to discover nature-based practices and offer them on, to facilitate transformative processes that are holding the possibility of experiencing *ecoself*. This *ecoself* is also there in every decision I make, trying my best in making an ethical way of living. And here for me is a big lesson about transformation; It may happen sometime later, or perhaps even during the experience without me or us noticing it!

RECALL A SPECIAL PLACE IN NATURE AND THE EXPERIENCE THAT MADE IT SPECIAL FOR YOU!

WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL CONNECTED TO THE REST OF THE WORLD?

WHAT WAS THE MOST REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR YOU? WHAT TRIGGERED IT?



# EMBED A DAILY PRACTICE INTO YOUR ROUTINE

*Treating yourself with a daily practice is one of the best gifts you can do for your body, your mind and your soul. In a word: to yourself.*

With a thirty-day online yoga challenge beginning the first day of the year, I began to build a daily practice. After going through the huge transformation of pregnancy, lactation and then ceasing to breastfeed my child, I was longing for a new relationship with my body. I had been following yoga classes before, but struggled to keep them up considering the fact that my weekly schedule was irregular and I didn't live close to a yoga studio. Nevertheless feeling the need for a body activity, I figured out a simple plan to bring yoga to home by randomly following YouTube yoga sessions when I felt the need. This is how I came across a thirty-day online yoga challenge by Adrien Mishler.

Filled with enthusiasm, I applied and completed the month without missing a single day, unexpectedly to realize how much value I gained from it. More comfort with my body, flexibility and energy, yet unexpected was the impact it was having on my mind and my soul. In a single word, I felt grounded, as if I had roots running from my feet down into the earth, deepening throughout my day. I also felt more mindful, able to focus my attention, more present, patient. I was actually looking for building a healthier relationship with my body, but I'd found a lot more, impacting different layers of myself; mind, spirit, energy and emotions.

The one-month challenge over, I kept it up. Enthusiasm, (ephemeral as you know), helped me to stick to my intention for the first month, but then I had to tap into other inner resources to be able to stay in daily practice for an indefinite amount of time. Finally, I built a habit out of it, booked myself special time during the day, got myself nice, comfortable tools to make it easier and joined an online community of practitioners.



As time went by, I realized the need to adjust my activity and explore new things, slowly developing a mix of bodily activity which now included meditation. This I felt suited me more, especially after realizing the huge impact of the annoying hip pain I'd been struggling with since my daughter was born had disappeared, plus the healthy mix of grounding, wellbeing and presence that had boosted my self-esteem. I was really feeling fine and happy with myself!

So here I provide some tips and insights about how to embed a stable, long-lasting daily practice into a daily routine, no matter what it is; yoga, meditation, journaling, drawing, running... I'm now deeply convinced that having a fixed daily appointment with myself is one of the healthier gifts I can do for myself. Let's begin.

1. Make it realistic. Start with ten minutes every day. Pick a simple activity you can do at home with no special equipment. You will make it longer when you feel ready; do not engage in a five-year strategic plan! Start simple.
2. Find what feels good to you. Start with something you really enjoy, something your brain will perceive as pleasant. If you find running hard and tiresome - don't begin with it!
3. Book a special spot for it in your daily routine, the same time every day. For me, it really worked making it the first thing I do when I wake up, at 6.30am, when the rest of my family is still lying quietly in bed.
4. Choose a good place for it, a comfortable and tidy one. Could be outside if the weather is mild. When travelling, looking for the place you will use for daily practice can be one of the first things on arrival to do.
5. Tell your family/partner/co-sharers you are doing it. Explain that from today on you will devote this moment to yourself. Tell them you need their support to keep up motivation, and you need to be alone in a quiet environment. Let them know that you will feel very well thanks to this, and they will also benefit from your wellbeing.
6. Find a buddy or a group. A friend, an online community, a Whatsapp group; someone as motivated as you are to share how it's going, the challenges

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MIND AND MY SOUL**

## BE KIND TO YOURSELF

you are facing and to support your motivation. You do not need to be physically together, but you will be surprised about how motivating the feeling of not being alone in this journey is.

7. An app could help. The benefit of an app is about keeping up your motivation and providing rewards. A habit-building app will: count how many consecutive days you are keeping up the practice, provide your brain with a juicy challenge, reward and remind you by letting you know that you are doing good and by providing notifications. App stores out there are filled with general to more specific apps that also provide content for your practice. When practising meditation I've been using Headspace, and I found it a good ally to support my daily activity.
8. Equip yourself well. Once begun, reward yourself with good equipment that will make your practice simple and pleasant - a yoga block, a meditation cushion, good shoes, etc.
9. Never miss twice. Missing is not an unforgivable sin, it can happen. But if you do, make sure to come back to your commitment the day after, otherwise missing becomes a habit.
10. Be kind to yourself. There will come days when you do not feel like engaging at all. Do not judge yourself for this. Make it shorter for that day, or plan a special reward for yourself if you can make it.

And finally, here's an overview of the most common challenges you may encounter:

1. Not finding the right moment. If you do not book a special or sacred moment in your daily routine, you will soon end up realising that it's already evening and keeping up the practice will feel like a burden rather than a pleasure. Book a special spot for it in your agenda!
2. Getting bored. Probably my biggest challenge. My brain craves for new things everyday, routine kills me. If this is your problem too, find a way to include novelty in the routine. Try a different yoga session every day or a new meditation; the web is full of good quality content you can tap into. Bad quality content is even more present, so make sure you have a list of trustful resources you can browse from.

3. Busy life. You are in good company! We all are busy - and if you have kids your day might feel like a constant rush. Ten to twenty minutes of daily activity won't make your life busier - rather they will help you with grounding and feeling less busy.
4. Tiredness and fatigue. There will be days when you will feel tired or exhausted. Be very honest. If missing is the best, miss one day; but remember - never miss twice! Otherwise adjust the practice based on that. Make it shorter, milder, walk rather than run. Do it laying down rather than sitting.

Enjoy!

WHAT DO YOU REALLY ENJOY DOING BUT NEVER FIND THE TIME FOR?

CAN YOU FIND TEN TO TWENTY MINUTES IN THE DAY TO DEVOTE TO THIS NOURISHING PRACTICE? TAKE OUT YOUR AGENDA, OPEN GOOGLE CALENDAR AND BOOK A DAILY MEETING WITH YOURSELF. NOW.



# MINDFULNESS AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF ALL

*The impact of Plum Village Mindfulness practices go much beyond one's individual wellbeing or stress relief, additionally bringing to awareness deep ecology, global ethics and social action.*

*Plum Village Tradition of Engaged Buddhism:*

*The key Plum Village teaching is that, through mindfulness, 'we can learn to live happily in the present moment—as a way to truly develop peace, both in one's self and in the world.'*

*Some of the key features of Plum Village Mindfulness:*

- *Mindfulness as a way of life - Plum Village tradition uses [the Five Mindfulness Trainings](#), a concrete expression of Buddhist teachings, to bring an ethical and spiritual dimension to decision making.*
- *Engaged Buddhism - a practice that is engaged with the challenges of our time, and in which personal spiritual growth and service to society go hand in hand.*
- *Community Building*

*Key elements of mindfulness:*

- *Stopping and calming*
- *Cultivating happiness and joy*
- *Taking care of difficult emotions*
- *Untangling our thinking*
- *Looking deeply - the insights of impermanence and interbeing*

*From: [www.plumvillage.org](http://www.plumvillage.org) and [www.plumvillage.uk](http://www.plumvillage.uk)*

*5 Mindfulness Trainings: [plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/the-5-mindfulness-trainings/](http://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/the-5-mindfulness-trainings/)*



Imagine a world where people, groups and organisations are bringing care, consideration and mindful intention to what they are doing; they listen to each other with compassion, and reflect on the impact their decisions make for themselves, others and the Earth.

This is the world I believe many of us long to see, partake of and co-create. One of the ways that helped me come closer to living in such a way has been practicing mindfulness in the Plum Village Tradition.

Some years ago, whilst searching for inspiration and support in how to live in times of global crisis, isolation and separation, I came across a group called Wake Up London. They are a community of young people who practice mindfulness together, inspired by the teachings of Zen master and peace activist, Thich Nhat Hanh. Here were a group of people who embodied the values of compassion and understanding that I so thirsted for.

Soon after, I decided to attend the mindfulness retreat to discover more about these practices. There, through daily activities such as eating, sitting, walking, working, speaking and listening, I experienced the depth and joy of mindfulness. Coming back to my breathing, bringing awareness to the joy of walking, being present with those around me, with my own thoughts and feelings I started to realise how little of my actual time I was intentionally spending 'here'. Rather, I had been living life on autopilot. But this time, washing dishes, eating a meal, looking at the tree or experiencing a challenging emotion with awareness and curiosity, I felt that I was encountering life in a much more meaningful way. A way that was inspiring gratitude and joy.

The practices seemed simple and ordinary, yet proved to be both powerful and transformative. By stopping and looking deeply, I found myself more and more in touch with the insight of interbeing; a term coined by Thich Nhat Hanh, understood as the interconnection of all things. One day during the retreat while chopping carrots for lunch in the

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SHAPES AND  
COLOURS**

practice of 'working meditation', I suddenly became captivated by their beauty, unique expression, shapes and colours. For a moment I found myself falling into a deep encounter, contemplating, where is this carrot coming from and how does it come into being? It appeared as a gift of the earth, sunshine, rain, the time and energy of farmers who put seeds into the soil and picked them when ready, plus all the other people involved in order for us to enjoy it for lunch. 'A carrot is made of non-carrot elements' - I remembered reading in one of Thich Nhat Hahn's books. Instantly, it brought a profound realisation that the carrot wouldn't be here without the support of Mother Earth and the entire universe and I could feel the magical

unfolding of this interconnected relationship with all beings.

This understanding is a source of love and compassion that in turn guide my actions in a daily life toward living more ethically, sustainably and happily, in service to life, the Earth and all beings. In times of global, social and environmental crisis, we need this awareness to make necessary the shift from mindless, harmful consumerism to a society based on harmonious, caring and mindful relationship for humanity, the Earth and all beings; one that sustains all life.

*"To practice mindfulness and to look deeply into the nature of things is to discover the true nature of interbeing. There we find peace and develop the strength to be in touch with everything. With this understanding, we can easily sustain the work of loving and caring for the Earth and for each other for a long time." (Source: T. N. Hahn, 1982)*

HOW MUCH OF YOUR TIME DO YOU ACTUALLY SPEND 'HERE' - WITH THOSE AROUND YOU AND WITH WHAT YOU ARE DOING? WHAT IS YOUR WAY OF COMING BACK TO THE PRESENT MOMENT?

WHAT DOES INTERBEING MEAN TO YOU? WHERE IN YOUR LIFE CAN YOU SEE THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF ALL THINGS?

WHAT IS THE WORLD YOU WANT TO SEE, PARTAKE AND CREATE? WHAT CAN YOU DO RIGHT NOW TO TAKE A STEP TOWARDS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS VISION OF THE WORLD?



DEBORA T. STENTA

# ENGAGING IN THE GIFT CULTURE AS A FORM OF ACTIVISM

*Reflections and examples of the culture of gift, to reclaim our sacred role of donors in the web of life.*

*“Gift culture is the key to sustainable living and real happiness on the planet. By witnessing and appreciating our own gifts and the gifts of others, we open the possibility for the organic unfolding of our whole beings and for accessing our deepest humanity to ensure the collective well-being of all life on the planet”*

*(Source: Jain, M., 2008)*

*Sarita kare na paan  
vriksh na fal chaakhe kadi  
khet na khave dhaan  
parhit neepjey sekhra.*

*Rivers never drink their own water  
trees never taste their own fruits  
fields never consume their own harvest  
they selflessly strive for the wellbeing  
of all those around them.*

*Saying from Mewar (Rajasthan, India)*



I have been travelling for almost four years around the world with my family of a child, a teenager, and two adults. Up until now, after having given up our house and belongings, we have received hospitality in about two-hundred homes. We have been offered shelter, food, water, clothes, books, tools, everything we needed to feel not just alive, but abundant, happy and healthy. At some point, the feeling of prosperity and fun reached such a degree that my partner and I decided to give up the idea of even asking for a fixed amount of money in exchange of our services, and we started working on a free donation basis.

Of course, the more we surrendered to this flow, the more everything in the world converged to support it! So it happened that while living in India, we bumped into a big gift culture movement, attending week-long events, taxi-riding, eating in restaurants, living in a flat... all based on free donations, moving along a web of generosity-based services, shops, bars.

Such experiences, and many others, completely transformed the way I dealt with people, material wealth, the Universe. This consciousness made me realize that I had been receiving all I needed for my whole life, since conception, and the Earth had never asked for something in return for her wonderful gifts. As it is perfectly described by Manish Jain's words, the gift culture inspired me to see my "resources and relationships as part of the larger commons that is accessible to all and nurtured by all." And he continues by saying that, "...engaging in the gift culture transforms our self and world understanding, by reminding us that we are being given gifts all the time from many known and unknown sources. [...]. This is critical for [...] re-asserting our dignity as diverse co-creators of learning and life. The gift culture also challenges the core underpinnings of the Global Market and the Development Project which are built on extraction and concentration of wealth and power and the spread of violence." (Source: Jain, M., 2008).

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RETURN FOR HER  
WONDERFUL GIFTS**

Joining the gift culture has been one of the most powerful, freeing and opening



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## **BEING AND FEELING “RICH” HAS LITTLE TO DO WITH HOW MUCH MONEY I HAVE AT MY DISPOSAL, AND A LOT TO DO WITH HOW CONNECTED, LOVED AND LOVING I FEEL**

acts in my life; it has made me realize that being and feeling “rich” has little to do with how much money I have at my disposal, and a lot to do with how connected, loved and loving I feel.

I enjoy to cross-pollinate small actions of gift-culture around, so here is a couple of them for you to explore:

### 1. Open a “Generous Shop”

When you are attending either an event, a training, a gathering, if you run a venue, or simply in your house, you can set up a table before it begins, decorating it with a nice fabric, flowers, colourful ornaments, loving words and so on.

Then, when people come, invite them to find the most valuable thing they have carried in their pockets or bags, and put it on the table for other people to take. They put something they love to let it go and live a new love story. At the same time invite them to take freely what they need from the table.

The table can go on for the whole duration of the event, or forever, in your house/venue.

### 2. Spread Kindness Cards around

This is how it works: imagine you order something in a bar and pay for your order. Instead of just taking your food or drink, paying for it and leaving, you pay double the price for an item, leaving one already paid for the next person who orders it. While paying, you hand the cashier a KINDNESS CARD, asking that they give the card to the next person when she or he comes to pay, to let them become aware of the initiative. This simple act will have a profound impact on that person and in your own life. The card serves as a reminder and a vehicle to be contagious. Here is an example of a KINDNESS CARD.

WHAT MAKES YOU TRULY FEEL RICH AND PROSPEROUS HERE AND NOW?

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU DO NOT DESERVE? OBSERVE WHAT COMES UP TO YOUR MIND.

WRITE DOWN A LIST OF 50 PEOPLE WHO HAVE ADDED VALUE TO YOUR LIFE.



**KINDNESS  
CARD**

It starts with you!  
Share a smile. Be kind.  
Brighten someone's day.

[WWW.GIFTOFKINDNESS.COM](http://WWW.GIFTOFKINDNESS.COM)

**Pass it on.**  
Someone cared enough to give you this card as a simple way to brighten your day. Now it's your chance to do the same. Do something nice for someone, for no reason at all other than to give the gift of kindness.



# SACRED LANDSCAPES

*Finding inner peace in outer wilderness.*

Whenever we go out to explore a hidden corner in some wild forest, catch the sunset from a favourite viewpoint or to enjoy the rocks or meanders of a river, there comes a crossroad. We can go left and enter these places as a visitor who uses the environment as a background, as scenery for our impression, pleasure and entertainment... Or, we can go right and enter the sacred space of our own nature where the boundaries melt, where we are one with the surroundings and where every moment offers a profound experience of interconnection, meaning, healing and enlightenment.

Let us go the right way for a while, open our awareness to the potential of entering the landscape with an inner goal instead of an outer one. Right there where the path splits into two, we can become a pilgrim and leave the tourist and sportsmen to go to the left. Opening our intuition and senses to the signs and messages around immediately creates the feeling of communication. There is no need for a map, we know exactly where to go.. Paths may even become a limitation and their markings misleading, because they don't show us the way in, they only go on through. We carefully cross the strip of grass dividing the path from the unknown space, and miracles start to happen.

You hear a bird of prey, two sharp sounds telling you that the adventure has just begun, and it's a confirmation and blessing for the journey. Your senses are awakened, you remember being an animal in one of your previous lives, knowing that the forest is your home, your natural environment and you understand it fully. All trees have a perfect

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**ALL TREES HAVE A  
PERFECT SHAPE,  
ALL PLANTS GROW  
IN THE RIGHT  
PLACE AND ALL  
FLIES HAVE THEIR  
PERFECT MISSION,  
THE AIR VIBRATES  
WITH ENERGY  
AND YOU CAN FEEL  
EVERY MOLECULE**



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**THERE IS NO SEPARATION BETWEEN YOU, THE PLANT, THE SUN AND THE SPIRIT OF IT ALL. YOU ARE AS ALL THE VARIOUS PARTS OF THE SAME WHOLENESS, REFLECTIONS OF THE SAME LIGHT**

shape, all plants grow in the right place and all flies have their perfect mission, the air vibrates with energy and you can feel every molecule. There is the sound of water from somewhere near, you understand the never-ending cycle of soft, calm strength which carved out the whole valley. The stones here have beautiful shapes, you touch some and feel each their unique character. Then comes a different sound: woodpecker drumming is a call to a new level.

You sit down and focus on a little plant which is trying to make its way through the wet soil and old leaves. Where does it come from? How does it know when to begin its yearly resurrection from hidden roots? Then you realize that it speaks with the sun because it comes from the

same source, made from the same elements and filled with the same spirit. It's not two parts of the same spirit, not two different wisdoms in separate bodies, it is one, always was and always will be. And then comes a third sound – a cuckoo's wake up call. At that moment, it all starts making sense.

There is no separation between you, the plant, the sun and the spirit of it all. You are as all the various parts of the same wholeness, reflections of the same light. You are filled with the same intelligence that moves the planets and makes trees grow. Like the former pilgrims, yogis, hermits, artists and all the other searchers who went out to find the way in, you experienced the universal principles and connected to the ultimate wisdom. This was only possible because the core of it was always within you, and there is nothing which is separate from it.

There is only one thin line between unity and duality, separation and connection, ignorance and understanding. This line can be dissolved by listening to the call for reconnection, openness to messages from the wilderness and acting in harmony with our true nature.

To connect with the mystery and to communicate with something higher, we traditionally visit sacred places like churches, sanctuaries, meditation centres or ashrams. Originally they were built in contrast to the chaos of the secular environment to represent the cosmic order where spirits are hosted, and we can get in touch with them. A centre is chosen, four cardinal directions are defined and a small model of the cosmos is created to give us orientation in the dangers of the wilderness. The sanctuary is there to give us hope and to offer understanding. But what is the chaos for a modern person? What is our jungle and what are the beasts in it that we fear? It's not easy to enter a meaningful sacred space in a city as it is usually another building whose symbolism we don't quite understand. There is a natural tendency to escape the chaotic jungle and seek a meaningful environment where we can connect to the source. Entering a forest, spending time with a favourite tree or observing the lunar eclipse is a chance to experience a deeper meaning. With openness to inner and outer messages, it can be a practice similar to visiting a church. Nature is revealing the deepest secrets through its universal language, and to understand it, is only a matter of listening.

WHAT ARE THE SHAPES, COLOURS, TEXTURES AND SMELLS OF THE STONES IN YOUR REGION?

DO YOU LIKE THE FULL MOON OR THE NEW MOON MORE?

WHAT IS THE LANDSCAPE THAT YOU GET HOMESICK FOR?



# BEING ALONE AND CONNECTING TO ALL

*How my Vision Quest helped reconnect me to myself and to Nature, then to start a new journey in green-living coaching.*

*A Vision Quest is an experience into the deeper understanding of Nature and Spirit. It is a ceremony and a rite of passage similar to an initiation. It can be a turning point in life taken, for example, before puberty to find oneself and one's intended life-path and spiritual direction. When an older child is ready, he or she will go on a personal, spiritual quest alone into the wilderness, often in conjunction with a period of fasting. This usually lasts for a number of days while the child is tuned into the spirit world. Usually, a guardian animal will come in a dream or vision, and the child's life direction will appear at some point.*

*The vision quest is a powerful way for adolescents as well as adults to acknowledge, mourn, release, welcome, and celebrate important life transitions of any kind. A vision quest can also be a deeply cathartic way to get away from it all and recharge your batteries.*

After some years of hesitating about my participation, I finally decided to set off on my first Vision Quest. I had heard some short stories, interesting moments from my friends who had already done it, but what was inspiring me more to do it was my current life situation. I was helping others to change their lifestyle; which was my professional career, but I was a little stuck with it and having a kind of mid-life crisis of my own with questions like, *Who am I? What am I doing?*

I had been working as a green-living coach for ten years. In the beginning, I worked a lot around the practical side of living green, but after a few years it turned out that it is simply not enough to teach WHAT to do. We need also to understand

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the WHY and the HOW. I strongly felt the need for something different; I didn't know exactly what it was, I just knew that it should be something that comes from the inside. The way our ancestors just did the what, why and how, we somehow forgot for they didn't learn from others how to live more naturally; they just lived their own life as being part of Nature.

I simply loved all the moments of my Vision Quest, although some of them were not so easy. Preparing together with a bunch of people with different backgrounds, going out in the heavy rain to the other side of the bay to a beautiful forest, finding my own place out there, building my shelter and just being there alone. I observed every little detail, finding my place in the world, then staying awake in the last night to have a sign from Nature. The next

day we all returned, sharing and listening to our stories, mine and theirs.

To sum it up, and although at the same time I don't want to persuade all people to do it, it is a great opportunity to experience deep connections to ourselves and the surrounding world. And so I incorporated the learnings I had as much as I could into my way of working with people.

I usually organise personal time in my programs; being alone, time for reconnection to ourselves, being aware of our personal wellbeing. I feel it also important to find our own way of learning and changing, spending time in nature which is essential for observing the world around, sensing it and becoming part of it. In such a journey we also need a safe environment; a circle of people, a community to share our stories and listen to theirs.

Even though it was a life-changing experience; spending twelve days in preparations, being 'out' and having my story mirrored back to me; my inner change had only just begun there and is still unfolding eight months later. So my first learning was that a big change, a great turning, doesn't necessarily happen as instantly as sometimes we might think in the consuming world. One should have a moment when crossing the threshold, starting the journey and then going

at one's own pace and style. This experience has really changed my way of thinking, way of living, relationship to myself and to nature and helped me to find a new approach in my green-living coaching work. Now my work is rooted in re-connection to ourselves, our community and to nature. I think this is the way one should go in working with sustainability; starting from the inside in marking our own personal journey, then finding a community to work or live in, to then find our place in the beautiful system around us.

This is my way of using it, but there are many ways of being in nature and working with it, an inexhaustible source for all of us. For me; being present, connecting, sensing, finding ourselves, are the keywords when planning my activities.

**A BIG CHANGE  
DOESN'T  
NECESSARILY  
HAPPEN AS  
INSTANTLY AS  
SOMETIMES WE  
MIGHT THINK IN  
THE CONSUMING  
WORLD**

HOW DO YOU CONSCIOUSLY MARK A THRESHOLD FOR TIME OUT?

WHAT DOES NATURE MIRROR FOR YOU RIGHT NOW?



# “THERE IS A CRACK IN EVERYTHING, THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN”

*Meditation as a path of unconditional self-acceptance toward the realization of our true self.*

*“There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in.”*  
Leonard Cohen

*Mindfulness meditation – just be aware of whatever is happening in the present moment (feelings, thoughts, physical sensations, sounds...), without judging them (as good, bad, pleasant, unpleasant...), without identifying with them (they are just an object of awareness, no matter whether it's a thought or sound), with acceptance and curiosity. Just be here and now fully.*

*Loving-kindness meditation consists in sending kind wishes, to yourself (this is a very important part of the practice), to loved ones and to others. “May I feel safe, may I feel healthy...” With every wish, we try to open our heart a little bit. What is important is not how we actually feel, but the willingness to open.*

Nine years ago, I decided to go to a ten-day meditation retreat. At that time, I didn't know much about meditation, but I was very interested and had a strong motivation. I wanted to be in peace, which meant for me, *get rid of thoughts, get rid of emotions and get rid of problems*. I wanted to attain some definitive state of invulnerability, untouchability, and unchangeability. As for many others, as I see it today, meditation was for me a tool for self-improvement or rather *radical*

self-improvement, and my approach to meditation was very much motivated by the idea that there's something fundamentally wrong with me.

Why? Because I have feelings. I have changing and unwanted emotions which very often I don't know what to do with, I don't understand myself and sometimes I don't have control of my life and in life in general, while everybody else is much more... than me.

*Hopefully, I will meet good teachers*, I thought. Very soon it was clear for me that just sitting with whatever arises and trying to accept it, trying to take it as it is, will not help me to *get rid* of all of these problems. Instead, I was encouraged to face whatever arises in my heart-body-mind moment to moment without judging and with loving-kindness and acceptance. Let everything be as it is, let yourself be as you are and just be there fully present.

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## **WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS NOT HOW WE ACTUALLY FEEL, BUT THE WILLINGNESS TO OPEN**

Step by step, as I was confronted with my inner world, with all that was unresolved, vulnerable, fragile... with all the different emotions of fear, anxiety, hopelessness... I was developing a deeper understanding and compassion toward myself and others. And alongside this, sometimes not easy path, there

were unexpected moments of light, peace, freedom, gratefulness and love that were supporting in me taking a further step. It was like a beautiful view from the top of the mountain before you begin to climb another.

What I learned during all these years of practice, could be summed up in three major things. First, I'm not my thoughts, feelings or behaviour patterns. Or not only that, I'm much more and I don't have to identify myself with some aspects of my personality. Maybe there is darkness but there is light as well. And I can be aware, I can acknowledge, I can accept things just as they are at this very moment, and then I can decide what to do.

Second, the importance of loving-kindness and self-compassion. It's not always easy to be a human. It's not easy to accept things as they are and it's not easy to accept ourselves. But this is the way. As meditation teacher Jack Kornfield puts it: "Much of the spiritual life is self-acceptance, maybe all of it." Acceptance doesn't mean to fold our hands in our lap. With acceptance, loving-kindness,

and self-compassion we can grow naturally, being nourished by the positive energy of love, to become who we are in our uniqueness.

And third, regardless of inner confusion, chaos, difficulties, feelings of inadequacy or imperfection, the core or the centre of our being is good, full of peace, love, joy, and equanimity; just what we were seeking the whole time. And it's always there, no matter the circumstances.

But this needs practice, regular if possible, to come again and again to the present moment, to step out of being caught in thoughts, to expand our awareness and to develop an attitude of acceptance a loving-kindness. It is also to remember or re-experience that we are already accepted for who we really are, and very often our vulnerability is a way toward our true identity.

## **I DON'T HAVE TO IDENTIFY MYSELF WITH SOME ASPECTS OF MY PERSONALITY**

HOW DO YOU CONNECT WITH YOUR CENTRE?

WHAT BRINGS YOU PEACE, JOY, AND LOVE?

IN WHICH WAYS COULD YOU DEVELOP MORE LOVING-KINDNESS TOWARD YOURSELF?



# DONT HAVE A STORY, STORYTELLING

*Once upon a time, in a time of great change and uncertainty, in a land not very from here... this story was hijacked by a marketing company, and sold to a corporation that put it on reality TV and, something got lost.*

*Storytelling predates written language and includes forms of pictographs, dance, word and movement.*

*Modern storytelling realises the importance of first giving space to hear the story of a person to enable trust and community-building, evening out a field before a decision-making process and as a natural practice for the health of any combination of people being together. It acts as a peacemaker and therefore preventative measure for conflicts, and restorative justice. Storytelling promotes intercultural comprehension, bypasses the analytical function of lists and facts and presents information in a way that allows a person to associate in connection to their own experience, is often more memorable and doesn't prescribe how a person should respond to it. Stories tap into emotions and motivate people.*

*"Storytelling describes the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, sometimes with improvisation, theatrics, or embellishment. Every culture has its own stories or narratives, which are shared as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation or instilling moral values. Crucial elements of stories and storytelling include plot, characters and narrative point of view."*

*(Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storytelling>)*

Justin is twenty-one, toes touching the earth, hands in his pockets as he lolls on a makeshift bench in a clearing. "Yeah! Got drunk!" The girl next to him knows it's her turn, looks down, and then across to her left and mumbles, "I don't have a story. Any stories..." The next girl looks blankly at the badge being passed around as a talking piece that has the number 18 written in it.

So what's the purpose of telling stories, so what? Despite the fact that 'stories' are plastered into the very fabric of the average modern life with huge media outputs; advertising, films, TV, radio, books, newspapers, internet and social media etc; 'Don't have a story' is a common theme that I hear in my work, particularly with young people. I shouldn't have been surprised, this was me too as a teenager, not having much consideration that something as ordinary as my life was anything worth talking about other than with close friends. Even to think of it as 'a story', would seem alien.

Why? What happened?

Im sitting in another clearing, away from 'civilisation.'

"If you come back to the camp, we will treat you like a ghost, we won't 'see' you unless you initiate the conversation. If you have to return early to end your fast, someone will be here to greet you, welcome you home." The final quester left, the camp quiet for the next hours and in some in-between space, awaiting the stories to return. 14 youngers have gone out to fast for 24-hours, build their shelters and be with the mirror of nature. I'm here for them to return to, at any time if needed, be of the village that they left behind. Here to hear their stories and mirror them back in a way to say; I hear your story, I see you, I welcome your return. I contemplate my own life at that point.

The shock and loss of the passing of my mother a few days before. The disagreement with my sister over a date for the funeral and the feeling of terror inside of being cut-off. I don't think I'm in a story, this is life, and it hurts right now.

For several months I miss the irony and divine wisdom that life can bring. Even trained in such matters, and having almost a decade-and-a-half experience in circles, it didn't dawn in me until I was in a gathering of council community that I myself had endured a real 'rite of passage' and needed to tell my own story, be heard. I call on the men who

**SO WHAT'S THE  
PURPOSE OF  
TELLING STORIES,  
SO WHAT?**

know me, and am attended by eight of them. Held in a rare and very precious moment, my healing starts to return, the arc of my grieving no longer lost in the wilderness. I begin to come home to know I was not alone, hearing other stories and having mine mirrored back to me of things I had not seen of value, reminded that the real value of story isn't the story itself, but the people who

are there to hear it... And not just for the truly darkest or brightest moments.

**THE REAL VALUE OF  
STORY ISN'T THE STORY  
ITSELF, BUT THE PEOPLE  
WHO ARE THERE TO  
HEAR IT...**

"I went to the forest, I saw a beetle and watched it. It was beautiful, and a bright green... I fell asleep there but after half-an-hour, when I awoke, it was still there! Then it flew away!"

"There," I said. "That's a story, right there!"

"No it isn't!" She replied indignantly.

In these few simple words I saw her beauty, childlike awe. That's how her story connected me, because she re-lived it, unaware that she was telling a 'story.' A story doesn't have to contain a blockbuster plot-line, it's these 'ordinary' stories that count for me when I'm needing to hear how another man managed to deal with his wife's third pregnancy and what the younger, expectant-of-first-child man might need to know, or how my friend marvelled at the significance of the beetle that was still there until she awoke, and then flew away.



# SOCIOCRACY

*A decision-making tool that will change our mindset about decisions, group processes and relationship to ourselves.*

*First developed in the Netherlands, Sociocracy is a collaborative governance tool that roots down into positivism and Quaker practices. Today, thanks to many contributors, variously different versions of Sociocracy exist. They share the basic principles and philosophy but provide different procedures, from Holacracy to the Agile and Lean methodology, to Sociocracy 2.0 and 3.0.*

*They are free and open methodologies that provide a group governance structure, (scaling up to - ideally - the entire world!) with defined procedures - or patterns - to create proposals, make decisions, define roles and much more.*

As soon as the training started, I felt I was involved in a much deeper process than I'd expected... I'd been hearing random people and friends talking about sociocracy for months, so finally I decided in July 2017 to engage in a five-day introduction to Sociocracy training. The course was hosted by the ecovillage "Il Tempo di Vivere" and part of the Erasmus+ funded project, Sociocracy Empowering Organizational Capacity (SEOC). It was aimed at empowering people to establish effective governance in organizations, companies and informal groups (Source: [sociocracy30.intranzitie.org](http://sociocracy30.intranzitie.org)). Our wonderful facilitator was [Genny Carraro](#), together with a team of experts that included [Simona Straforini](#). I joined the training expecting to add a new tool to my facilitation skill-set in dealing with the decision-making process that supports groups. I found much more...

As a first activity, Genny invited us to explore our inner sociocracy: the dialogue of voices from our different characters, the parts of ourselves that we are

inhabited by. The idea behind this was that group processes are deep, complex and composed of many different layers. The first wise step to take when engaging in group processes was actually self-awareness; building a grounded, mindful relationship with yourself. This was a great 'aha' moment for me: groupwork is deeply entangled with those relationships we have with ourselves.

So the whole training and since has been more about my personal process rather than group dynamics. Yes, we have been practising different sociocratic methodologies, procedures, analysis in details; but what has touched and changed me the most have been the personal conflicts I have been experiencing with other people while trying to learn a new tool. To phrase it in a few words: this tool, that apparently deals with very concrete and action-oriented issues

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**THIS TOOL HAS MORE TO DO WITH PERSONAL GROWTH THAN MANY OTHER APPROACHES THAT DEAL DIRECTLY WITH OUR INNER WORLD.**

with complex procedures and step by step structures, has more to do with personal growth than many other approaches that apparently deal directly with our inner world.

Now I'm using Sociocracy to work as a facilitator with groups and to manage governance in some of the projects I'm involved with. I'm not an expert, and rather than setting up complete Sociocratic structures I just use some of the tools and procedures in a lighter way. But still, sticking to the procedures has brought me many new insights. For example, I've been working with a group of young people about regenerating a public place. The group had to

present their project to the public administration and we needed to decide who was going to present it. I must admit that as the tutor of the group I had my own idea about who should have been doing it, but in this case, we decided to stick to the sociocratic procedure to define new roles. Totally unexpected for me, the final decision was to have two people doing the presentation, one of which was a shy young foreign woman who did not speak very fluent Italian. She decided she could step out from her comfort zone and do the presentation because she was supported by the other person. Such a win-win, personal and group-empowering solution I hadn't, as a tutor, considered.

Besides the procedures, there are also some "mantras" or basic principles that

have been changing my mindset about decision making. The first one is that a decision should be “Good enough for now and safe enough to try” Not the best decision, not a definitive forever-lasting decision, but a good enough decision that we test and adjust based on our experience, and a safe-enough one so that a potential failure won’t be too risky. Both imperfection and time are included in the decision; two dimensions that I was not used to considering in the usual way I dealt with decisions as something definitive and key, and that brought a lot of pressure to the process.

**“GOOD ENOUGH  
FOR NOW,  
AND SAFE  
ENOUGH TO TRY”**

Another mantra I love is “fail fast and pivot” Failure is a great learning tool as long as we allow ourselves to do it, and if we are flexible enough to pivot, we can change direction with a light heart and a light mind. The last brilliant insight for me is about how Sociocracy understands objections: objecting to a proposal is a gift to the group. The gesture used for this is showing a closed fist, fingers up, ready to open, as if you were bringing a surprise to a loved one. This means that when one objects, one is really working towards a better solution for the whole group. All we have to do now, is try it!

HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN WORKING WITH GROUPS OR EXPERIENCING GROUP DYNAMICS? WHAT ARE YOUR RECURRENT PATTERNS?

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH PERFECTION?

HAVE YOU EVER STOPPED TO REFLECT ON THE CULTURE OF THE GROUPS YOU ARE PART OF?

AS A SIMPLE ACTIVITY, YOU MAY CHOOSE ONE OF THESE GROUPS; YOUR FAMILY, YOUR WORKING ENVIRONMENT, AN ASSOCIATION YOU ARE PART OF... AND WRITE DOWN THE VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND PATTERNS YOU SHARE AS A GROUP. BOTH THE EXPLICIT ONES - THE ONES YOU HAVE DISCUSSED AND AGREED ABOUT - AND THE UNSEEN ONES - VALUES OR HABITS YOU MAY NOT BE AWARE OF.



# FINDING WELLNESS AROUND THE GLOBE

*There are many ways to sustainability, some of them shorter, some longer. My journey towards wellness took me through several continents, hundreds of books and years of research. Have I arrived yet?*

*Wellness is a holistic concept of human functioning and flourishing. The National Wellness Institute defines wellness as an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence. As such, the concept is being applied in individual work as well as in families, communities, workplaces and companies, encompassing the overall well-being of a planet.*

*Practices of wellness promotion are grounded in self-determination, person-centred care, authentic relationships and collaboration. For further reference visit the works of John Travis, Donald Ardell, Bill Hettler, Michael Arloski and the numbers of practitioners who have followed their work.*

Being a university student of Physical Education and a semi-professional sportswoman in the Czech Republic, at times *I thought* I had understood, learnt about and lived the healthy lifestyle. I had (more than) enough physical activity, the canteen offered averagely nutritious meals and my days were filled with classes, part-time jobs and daily routines with life in the city in the heart of Europe.

I'd been introduced to wellness at the beginning of my master studies when I was abroad in Denmark, for a semester in Gerlev Idraetshojkskole. This boarding school had a creative study plan filled with 5-7 hours of movement

daily, and many hours of other mainly social programs and activities. Little did I know about the country being supposedly one of the happiest on Earth until the school decided to put this message across to their students. But... I struggled. It was difficult to be playing games all the time, sitting in “family groups” and talking, singing songs in morning assembly, being social in endless activities organized by/for students. It was nothing like my adult life at university, where I could “just” participate in classes, get things done and then go home. Here I had to be joyful.

It was in one morning class I remember clearly, when the headmaster of the school asked us, “What is wellness?” Pathetically enough, this question changed my life. My personal answer was about spa and massage which is the typical European understanding of the term, but that day, I discovered that wellness is rather about the innate joy of living fully in our days.

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## **I HAD A STRONG DEDICATION TO LIVE AND BE WELL, TO FIGURE A WAY HOW TO ACHIEVE IT**

I ended up reading the [\*Wellness Workbook\*](#) from start to finish and I loved it. I decided to write my master thesis about it, the second thesis also, and finally extended it towards a dissertation research. All this with the intention to understand the concept which I'd never heard of before, and which seemed so distant from the lived and promoted lifestyles

I saw around me. I loved the wellness ideas and after some time, I understood the methodologies and reasons why the Danish school worked the way it did. Still, I was leaving my semester there with heavy feelings, yet, I had a strong dedication to live and be well, to figure a way how to achieve it.

Although my personal journey to wellness started in the mind, it was my body who taught me the second lesson. There would be times when I found myself writing my thesis with deep excitement about the topic, but had a strong pain in my back after hours of sitting by my computer. So as a sports person, I would compensate for this sedentary habit by going out running, but as a consequence would end up in bed physically exhausted by the end of the day. Nevertheless, I loved it. I seemed to master all the recommendations about living healthily, being effective, following my passions, and at times I would truly feel that excess of joy. Yai! But for most of the time my body would be tired and unwell – I was apparently facing towards the illness end of the wellness spectrum (see work of John Travis).

I ended up in Turkey for another semester abroad to create some space for work on the theoretical concept of my research. Little did I know that in Turkey I was about to get another life lesson, taught by practice. The lifestyle in that country was (and still is) culturally, socially, politically and spiritually very distant from how people live in central Europe. Moreover, shortly before my arrival, Turkey entered war with Syria and I was worried that such a situation threatened one of the basic needs for security for its people, including me for the given time.

**IN EVERY CULTURE  
AND EVERY  
COUNTRY, PEOPLE  
HAVE A SIMILAR  
WISH. A WISH TO  
LIVE A HEALTHY,  
JOYFUL AND  
SATISFYING LIFE**

You can only imagine my surprise when it turned out to be the contrary. Months of time there taught me the deepest lessons in the Turkish way of wellness – the tradition of Hammam, taking time to drink tea and reading the future from a coffee cup, slowly savouring every moment with all senses and appreciating life for what it is now. Definitely, I didn't get my ten-thousand steps every day, and eating kebab with ayran daily might not be the most balanced diet, but I never ate in a hurry, always in great company with friends, and that for sure made some deeper parts of me feel incredibly peaceful and more healthy.

That was at the time that I started to realize the profound impact of environment on one's wellness. From Turkey I moved to Wisconsin, living this cultural shift now imprinted into my days and research. The American approach to wellness and life is a great teacher in conceptualizing and wording topics that in my own culture very often remain unspoken or unrecognized, or just labelled as "weird." Topics such as emotions, feelings, needs, beliefs, relationships, meditation, silence, nature and many other "softy" subjects. I also learnt that even though wellness in the USA exists, has been studied and practised for over 40 years, it is still challenging for Americans to live well.

So did I find my own wellness there? In the birthplace of the wellness concept, with all the precious books in the local library and loving hosts who had me in their home? I did and I didn't. I finished the research, concluding that both for American and Czech university students, health means physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being and that the most overlooked dimension is our social health. Data supported my personal conclusion. I felt super-satisfied with the

research but deeply lonely on the other end of the planet, far from my family, my partner, my friends, my land, my culture, my future. So, I packed all my learnings and headed back home, finally ready to land, root and practice what I have learnt about the healthy life(style).

Along this wellness journey of mine – which is still unfinished and continues with every new place I visit – I learnt that in every culture and every country, people have a similar wish. A wish to live a healthy, joyful and satisfying life. Each culture has its own recipes for achieving it, every country very different resources to use, different history and many challenges to overcome. Yet if its people are/were feeling well, they do/would treat each other, their families, their guests and the world around them, with kindness.

This is the world I wish to live in.

CAN YOU LIST 4-5 HABITS OR ACTIVITIES THAT MAKE YOUR DAYS JOYFUL AND SATISFYING?

REFLECT ON THE DIMENSIONS OF HEALTH - PHYSICAL, MENTAL, SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL. WHICH ONE OF THEM MIGHT NEED A BIT MORE CARE FOR YOU TO FEEL MORE WELL?

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU COULD DO FOR YOUR FRIEND(S) OR COMMUNITY? DO IT.



ROYALTY

# CYCLING TO INFINITY

*Learning from the Medicine Wheel and natural cycles, turning the wheel of life.*

*We can understand the [Medicine Wheel](#) as a ceremonial space for prayer and meditation, a wise guide on our life journey, map of psycho-spiritual space for our world. It has been plainly symbolised by four directions, connected across a circle with a centre expressing oneness, wholeness, peace and harmony. Since the Medicine Wheel has been used all over the world, there are diverse conceptions and layers of the wheel, according to different cultures and traditions. A very inspiring element for me is its cyclical nature, for with every direction we can associate a season, phase of the moon or period of life, also specific characteristics along with their light and shadows.*

*The wheel expresses interconnectedness, the oneness in all layers of nature including humankind, constant movement, and the infinite circle of life. It teaches us about meaning and the beauty of all phases. It can show us where we are in life and where we are heading towards.*

*We can learn with and from the cycles by simply observing them; in us and around us.*

*We can support the flow and synchronise our inner clock with the cosmic cycle by acknowledging and celebrating transitions between different phases - be it rites of passage while stepping to adulthood or elderhood, a greeting of the sun every morning, or thanksgiving to winter and welcoming the spring at the right moment.*

From my diary.

*November 2nd, 1979*

I was born at noon on All Souls Day, the day when we connect and celebrate with our beloved ones who have already passed away. And from today, we will also celebrate birth and life.

**Breath in – pause – breath out – pause – breath in...**

*May 5th, 1998*

Today I'm working in the garden in my favourite corner, with compost. Magical place. I'm bringing there weeds and leaves from the garden, leftovers of fruits and vegetables from the kitchen. I leave them for a year to decompose, shuffle it from time to time, and time and again, I'm astonished by the black soft fragrant soil into which the untidy pile turns. I distribute the soil back into the garden and onto new vegetable beds and to all the flowers, bushes and little trees.

It's starting to rain.

*July 29th, 2003*

It's new moon today, time of my menstruation. I can see clearly what is hidden most of the time, my consciousness is widened, I feel connected. I need to rest, to be alone, to nourish myself to gain strengths for the next month. I already know it. And if I do so, life will be easier for me and everybody around. I will be productive and brilliantly smart when my moon time passes, I will be enchanting and empathic with the full moon during my ovulation, and creative, intuitive and constructively critical just before another moon time will arrive. I already know it. If I will not listen to my body and soul... I will be exhausted and withdrawn for the whole month. So I rather go to take a bath.

**Thanks to the Earth, which supports me every day, with no expectations and demands.**

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**TO ENJOY AND  
APPRECIATE MY  
MOON TIME, TO  
OBSERVE THE  
TRANSFORMATIVE  
POWER OF  
COMPOST OR TO  
ACCEPT MY WINTER  
DEPRESSION  
HELPS ME ALSO  
TO WELCOME AND  
VALUE ELDERHOOD  
AND DEATH, TO SEE  
MEANING AND GIFT  
IN ALL PHASES OF  
DIFFERENT CYCLES.**

March 30th – April 2nd, 2018, Easter

On Friday I'm entering the night forest and blowing out the candle, meeting darkness, chaos, nothingness. On Saturday I continue the underworld journey, walking the labyrinth, meeting daemons, inner and outer shadows. On Sunday I have a morning bath in a cooling creek, light the candle again and celebrate. With friends, we rearrange the labyrinth into a medicine wheel, wheel of life, dharma wheel and dance through it again and again. I feel fresh, sparkling, light, fertile. Cosmic order is re-established, life makes sense again. Together with spring nature and the Christ in Easter's mysterium, I'm resurrected, as every year. After winter hibernation, I'm back with new sprouting energy, ready to start new things. Fire, symbol of transformation, dances with us.

March 23rd, 2018

My grandma passed away. I feel sadness, nostalgia, peace, gratitude.

**To enjoy and appreciate my moon time, to observe the transformative power of compost or to accept my winter depression helps me also to welcome and value elderhood and death, to see meaning and gift in all phases of different cycles. With every flower planted and look toward the moon, my body is remembering this natural wisdom, nature of all life.**

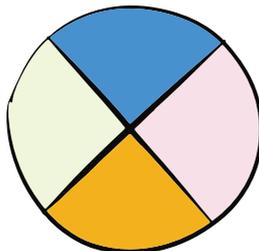
Also my friend, my first love, died. Him, his wife and their little son. I feel sorrowful, desperate and angry. Peace is not coming. It was too early. It was their spring and summer time, not a winter! ...There is still much to learn.

**Breath in – pause – breath out – pause – breath in...**

WHICH CYCLES DO YOU OBSERVE IN YOUR LIFE AND IN NATURE?

WHICH IS YOUR FAVOURITE SEASON? WHY?

WHEN DID YOU LAST LOOK AT THE MOON?





# IKŠKĪLE FREE SCHOOL

## HOLISTIC APPROACH IN EDUCATION

*Ikšķile Free school - teaching freedom, nature, community and Latvian traditions.*

*Holistic education can be considered a rather new movement, while at the same time often referring to many types of existing alternative education; Montessori, Waldorf, Emilia Regio inspired schools and others. Holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to humanitarian values such as compassion and peace.*

*True to its name, holistic education places an emphasis on the whole growth of a learner instead of emphasizing only specific parts of the human experience. It downplays materialism while promoting growth in all areas of human experience; intellectual, emotional, social and so forth. Proponents of a holistic education argue that it promotes balanced relationships not only between people, but between people and their environment. Taken all together, holistic education emphasizes democratic learning, emotional health, and relationship growth to a far greater degree than the traditional learning environment. ([Becton, 2019](#))*

*Curriculum can vary in schools that use a holistic education approach, however the main ideas commonly present are:*

- focusing and listening to each child and helping the child to see his/her potential*
- helping children learn about themselves, themselves with other people and themselves in nature*
- keeping in balance emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual development.*

*Ikšķile Free school in Latvia practises holistic education. Developing its own approach to education based on Latvian folklore and love for nature, the values of this school are freedom, nature, community and Latvian traditions.*

I now have three children but since my first was born, the question of what kind of world my children will grow up in has been important. Along with many families, having children invited us to revise our own daily habits - what we eat, where we live, what do we use to clean our house and if some things are not appropriate for children, are they appropriate for us?

When school-time approached for my older daughter, I was very happy that close to our home was a very special school - Ikšķile Free school, which was established and run by parents. It is a private school but we rather see it as community orientated, since it was begun by families wishing to have a different experience for their kids that further opened their doors to others who also found holistic child education important. Now all of my children are students of Ikšķile Free school and I work there in helping the school to develop.

Highlighting some importance in how the school helps students and families learn about themselves, others and the world, I need to emphasise that school is not only about children learning and developing; it is also very much about parents and larger families, as we all need to grow and change our daily routines to have a healthier life, a healthier world.

Physical development has much to do with our physical body, and in this school all sports classes take place outside, all students have long breaks between classes and lunch outside, and they also spend time outside after classes. The school provides vegetarian and organic food and has taken the effort to become the only certified organic public caterer in Latvia. The school has its own garden where many vegetables for our lunches originate.

**IN IKŠKĪLE FREE  
SCHOOL, LEARNING  
ABOUT YOURSELF  
IS AN IMPORTANT  
PART OF THE STUDY  
PROCESS**

Intellectual development refers to many things that students learn in school, how they make sense of the world they live in. In Ikšķīle Free school, learning about yourself is an important part of the study process. Every day, for example, starts with the teacher and students of the class coming together to see how everybody is.

Ikšķīle Free school is part of the Eco-School movement, which encourages young people to engage in their environment by allowing them the opportunity to actively protect it. Through the programme, students experience a sense of achievement at being able to have a say in the environmental management policies of their schools. School Eco-council consists of students, teachers and parents who analyse the practices of the school and proposes changes. This year the focus is on trash and the Eco-council is promoting the idea of reducing the amount of trash created at school and at home, supporting each family in making a commitment of some daily habit they can alter. This year many families committed themselves to eliminate the use of plastic bags when shopping; we organised several workshops for making small bags to replace plastic ones.

The school also pays particular attention to integrating issues of sustainability in all subjects. For example in maths, students calculate the amount of trash that is buried in Latvia, and in English class, there comes a good time to watch a movie about trash and how it affects nature.

Emotional development is primarily about encouraging students to recognise their emotions, find ways in how to best deal with and express them. Emotional development also has to do with relationship to nature. As such, the school has many activities which promote positive attitude and love towards nature, raising young people who will take care of it and who place the interests and needs of the living world on the same level as their own. Pre-school kids have a special place in the forest where they go every week, where they also love going for picnics; my four-year-old happily came back from the first one! Older kids always love classes in nature, especially to enjoy bike trips to the nearby forest.

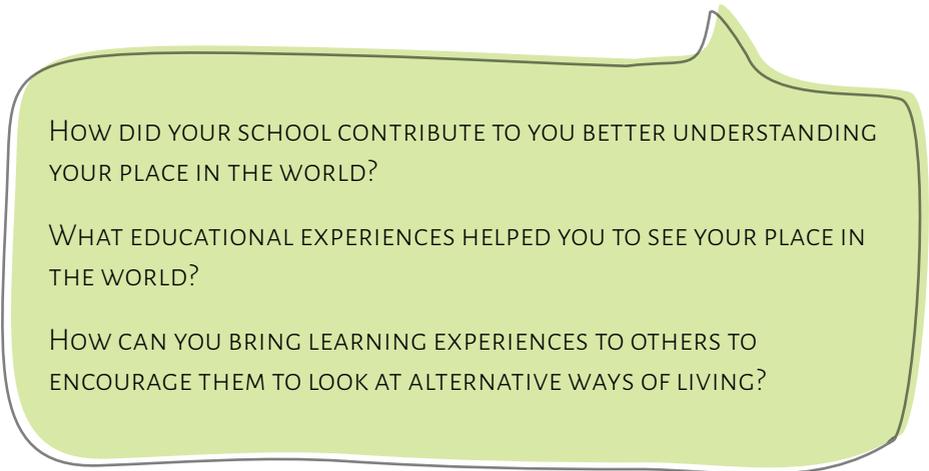
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**IKŠĶĪLE FREE  
SCHOOL IS A  
COMMUNITY OF  
LEARNING WHERE  
I GROW AND  
LEARN ABOUT  
MYSELF AND THE  
ENVIRONMENT**



Spiritual development refers to understanding our role and place in the world, understanding that we ourselves are part of nature, that we are connected to it. It is both about understanding our individual responsibility to act and our role in showing others, even to bring changes on a system level when necessary. Ikšķīle Free school by example, is the first school to provide certified organic food to students and among the few schools that now provide vegetarian food which until 2018 was illegal, as state law prescribed how many potatoes and how much meat school children should eat per week. The school initiated a legal case to prove this requirement outdated and unethical, and changes in the law were subsequently introduced.

Ikšķīle Free school is a community of learning where I grow and learn about myself and the environment. I wish each of you find your learning community and that we can all grow to see the many alternatives available!



HOW DID YOUR SCHOOL CONTRIBUTE TO YOU BETTER UNDERSTANDING YOUR PLACE IN THE WORLD?

WHAT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES HELPED YOU TO SEE YOUR PLACE IN THE WORLD?

HOW CAN YOU BRING LEARNING EXPERIENCES TO OTHERS TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO LOOK AT ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIVING?



# IN SEARCH FOR AN INTEGRAL APPROACH

*An educational approach that brings forward our interconnection and interdependence, is inspiring for courageous actions toward a more peaceful and compassionate planet, and encourages one to live life in integrity.*

*Humane education can be defined as: “A process that encourages an understanding of the need for compassion and respect for people, animals and the environment, and recognizes the interdependence of all living things.”*

*Four key elements of humane education:*

- *Providing accurate information (so we have the knowledge to face challenges)*
- *Fostering the 3C’s: curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking (so we have the tools to meet challenges)*
- *Instilling the 3R’s: reverence, respect, and responsibility (so we have the motivation to confront challenges)*
- *Offering positive choices and tools for problem-solving (so we will be able to solve challenges).*

*Thus, humane education not only instills the desire and capacity to live with compassion, integrity and wisdom, but also provides the knowledge and tools to put our values into action in meaningful, far-reaching ways so that we can find solutions that work for all.*

*More information and ideas for activities on [humaneeducation.org](http://humaneeducation.org)*

Entering a classroom at Harvard University to attend a workshop on sustainable consumerism, I was not expectant for big discoveries or *aha* moments. Yet attending this class for just a few hours was to shape the way I was going to work in the years to come. This workshop was delivered by a teacher that had left a high-paying job in the fashion industry, now to speak out not only about the impact of our everyday clothing choices, but also about the interdependence of all and inspire everyone to take action for a better and happier planet. Finally, I had come across an educational approach that did not turn away from uncomfortable questions about our everyday choices and their impact, interlinking a variety of seemingly separate subjects of oppression, people, animals and environment. At the end of the day, it is about our ability to extend compassion and care to all living beings and to be motivated to make a difference.

Humane education tackles four main areas; human rights, environmental protection, animal welfare and the wellbeing of all. Few are the organizations that dare to take such a wide scope and connect all of the existing issues in single educational activity. Yet ultimately, the problem in one field points to problems in others, and the more aspects and interests we take into account while solving the world's challenges, the more sustainable solutions we might be able to find. After attending the workshop, I rushed to bring humane educators to Latvia and co-create a summer camp providing English classes through humane education activities for school kids. The camp was one of the best in terms of teamwork and content; openness to talk about every subject, discuss sensitive issues with the intention to listen with care, find ways to do most good and least harm, it created an environment of co-operation and hope.

At least twelve years have passed since I first heard the concept of humane education. Since then I have been integrating single humane education activities and their approach in the courses I facilitate. I have witnessed many *aha* moments due to the numerous discoveries of how the products we consume are made, and how powerful we might be at influencing the agenda of companies and governments, locally and internationally. And we might just start at being inspired by our own life and seek ways to transform daily life so

that we can live with more integrity and really strive to walk the talk. For me, this approach has given hope that as social change-agents, we will dare to be critical to our limiting thinking patterns, dare to be more critical to information presented to us, be more creative as to how the challenges we are presented get resolved. Let us be more inspired to fill our lives with little deeds of service to others and the planet, and ultimately, ourselves.

## WHAT ATTRACTED ME THE MOST TO HUMANE EDUCATION WAS THE CARE FOR THE HUMAN HEART

What attracted me the most to humane education was the care for the human heart. Humane education centres around bringing more sincerity, kindness and joy to experience on this planet, relating with other beings, being curious and pro-active in co-creating a meaningful imprint of our life on the face of the Earth. I truly believe that the inner transformation that happens when we are faced with good information combined with increased skills in creativity, critical thinking and collaboration, being exposed to role models and many possibilities to do greater good in this world, we are bound to make a difference and inspire others to do so.

WHAT MOVES IN YOU WHEN YOU SEE OTHERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE? IN WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE CAN YOU MAKE DIFFERENT CHOICES TO DO MORE GOOD, AND LESS HARM?

WHAT DO YOU FEEL PASSIONATE ABOUT IN THIS WORLD AND READY TO TAKE A STAND FOR?

WHAT ARE YOUR TALENTS, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU CAN BRING INTO YOUR WORK AS AN EDUCATOR FOR CHANGE?

# FROM THE HEART OF THE WORLD

## CEREMONY, THE BRIDGE OF ACTIONS, INTENTIONS AND PRAYER

*“What is the secret of the grail?” Asks the omnipotent voice in an Arthurian legend. “You my Lord! You and the land are one!” Is the reply. This was something of a holy grail experience for me, and there he was, right in front of me...*

Every year they would come down from the mountain and do ceremonies on the beach, singing, dancing, praying to remember the earth and contribute to things remaining in some sort of balance. ‘Nice,’ I thought, indigenous people doing their thing, ceremonies etc. Gave me a good feeling, some people caring about the world but their way bore no real relationship to me.

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**SUDDENLY I STOPPED, AWAKE IN AN INSTANT TO WHAT I'D SEEN THOSE PEOPLE ON THE BEACH WERE ACTUALLY DOING**

An evening in early summer 1990, I'd turned on the TV to watch a documentary on the Kogi Indians from the Sierra Nevada mountains in Columbia. Interesting I thought, calling themselves the elder brother and carrying a message for we of the west, the younger brother. They had noticed that the ecology of their place high in the mountains was changing, largely they perceived, due to poor handling of natural resources and general lack of ecological awareness by younger brother. They felt the need to send word, a message to humanity.

It was the following evening. My partner, myself and a friend had hired a village hall and invited a few people to come and 'free dance'. A kind of unstructured, un-led 5 Rhythms. Our friend who was a kindergarten teacher, had made simple card animal masks. At one point I put on the mask of a snow leopard to fool around with.

Big shift.

Not only did my movements change, my body felt different. I started to occupy different spaces inside myself, interact with the outer space differently. Suddenly I stopped, awake in an instant to what I'd seen those people on the beach were actually doing. The music, the rhythms, were supporting me in some way along with the mask to connect me to something 'other' than my habitual experience of self. The combination had unexpectedly given me permission to feel and behave differently without my critical mind interfering and modifying my behavior. That's what they were doing, getting into a state, uninhibited by self-identity, praying not just for themselves, but for the world, the people the animals, plants and natural forces. Suddenly I had a 'glimpse' of being indigenous, and what that 'thing' called ceremony could be about.

Now Kogi Indians don't come down from their mountain often, only perhaps to do such important ceremony. So if you meet one it's pretty rare unless you go Sierra, very high up and through inhospitable terrain, and are invited. Anyway, by unexpected chance I did meet one, at the Ojai Foundation in California, where Way of Council originated. The man was travelling with a companion to try to reach more people with their message, the message first relayed by the documentary I'd seen in 1990. How interesting is life, for now 2017 and twenty-seven years later I'm a Council facilitator, trainer and mentor, simple ceremony the essence of my work and practice. I've seen how societies and communities are inseparable from their environments and the loss of that

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**LOSS OF THAT  
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TO PLACE HAS  
LEFT A SENSE  
OF COMMUNITY  
SEEKING ITSELF,  
BUT HAVING  
LITTLE OR NO  
ROOTS TO HOLD IT  
THROUGH TIMES  
OF ADVERSITY AND  
CHANGE**

connection to place has left a sense of community seeking itself, but having little or no roots to hold it through times of adversity and change. In council and other times I have seen the power of ceremony return the connection and re-establish the grounding needed for consistent, long-term integrated, land-based communities. And now this moment, was something of a holy grail experience for me. There he was, right in front of me... And...

He didn't speak! A surprise and quite a disappointment. His companion talked, presented, showed photographs and charts, while he, Manu, said nothing...

I surmised after some time that perhaps he hadn't spoken because there hadn't been offered a ceremonial space to communicate, rather we sat in rows and had a lecture. I'll never know, but he did in fact 'speak' to me, for the next day in my meditation he came into my mind, with some very clear instructions...

### **About Ceremony**

*Good ceremony has clear intention, organised or free-flowing actions, elements that open and close a threshold that by so doing, focuses the attention of the participant(s) and allows space beyond the desired outcome to touch the unknown and or spirit beyond. It is the bridge between intent, actions and a prayer, an invitation let's say, to the beyond. And beyond the simple idea of a ritual in the sense of a repeated series of actions, ceremony can lend itself more to the moment to define itself, the ingredients and focus flexible according to the wisdom of emerging needs and awareness.*

*Ceremony can be a personal or group invitation to intimate connection, to the essence of something where agreements are often inferred or remembered at a cellular level, and a marking of a special time; the significant occasions of our journeys. A simple ceremony can be the offering back of gratitude, for anything, a moment of prayer aided by a candle, a drum, a pouring of waters. Making something ordinary become important, become sacred, become everything, and worthy of our best and present, loving attention...*

*The Kogi or Cogui or Kágaba, meaning "jaguar" in the Kogi language,*

are an indigenous ethnic group that lives in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia. Their civilization has continued since the Pre-Columbian era, the last descendants of one of the greatest civilizations in Latin America.

(Source: Wikipedia and [BBC](#)).

WHAT ARE YOU TRULY GRATEFUL FOR AND HOW DO YOU EXPRESS THAT?

WHAT EVERYDAY THING IS IT THAT CALLS YOU TO CARE FOR OR MAKE SPECIAL?

HOW COULD YOU USE CEREMONY TO INSPIRE, SUPPORT OR CONNECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS IN OUR WORK?



# THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LISTENING

*How listening can transform an escalation toward potential violence into a wonderful connecting moment.*

*Theory U - designed by Otto Scharmer and carried by the Presencing Institute hosted by MIT, Boston (USA) - is a process for supporting innovation and deep change within personal, organisational and social contexts. The name comes from the process shaped graphically by a 'U' form.*

*The aspect presented in this article is the left and descending part, characterized by the 4 levels of listening.*

- Level 1 is defined as **downloading**, the process that our mind does to confirm, or validate what we already know and to enact what we usually do.
- Level 2 is defined as **factual listening**, where the shift of our focus is from us, to that which attracts our attention: the object of our attention.
- Level 3 is defined as **empathic listening**, which happens when our attention is moving from the object (the fact) to the evolving being (person) in front of us and to the changes that are taking place in the moment within that person in front of us.
- Level 4 is defined as **generative listening**, which happens when the focus of our attention is directed to the emerging future that is manifesting before us. This makes something visible that was not in the range of possibilities that our attention had considered before.

*(Source: [www.presencing.com](http://www.presencing.com))*

It was around 8:30 in the morning, thirty-minutes before the training participants would arrive. I came early to enjoy the precious time to get connected with the room, the sounds from outside and to personally welcome each of the participants as they entered. The previous day had been intense, finishing an hour after the set limit, the participants in groups of three had been so engaged in their group work that they were only able to enter the training centre's wonderful library, after the librarian had left. We had taken the key from reception under the strict promise that everything would be left in the exact same order that we found it.

**THIS FLASH  
WAS ENOUGH  
TO CHANGE  
COMPLETELY MY  
INTENDED REPLY  
OF DENIAL AND  
JUSTIFICATION, TO  
AN ANSWER OF  
WELCOMING HIS  
DEEP CARE FOR THE  
BOOKS**

And I was sure we did!

Finishing my preparations and as I was taking out papers from my bag, I saw the librarian from a distance advancing towards me with big steps. I could sense from his movement something was wrong, the feeling that a dragon was about to open his mouth and let fire touch me. Indeed his words reached me like fire; *"I have seen that you were with the group in the library and now the books are not in order!"*

For a moment I felt overwhelmed, but just before my mouth could match his fire with fire, one dragon to another, I saw in a flash his feeling of not being appreciated for his work. I saw the love that he had for the books and the care he was putting into his work, and I saw that the he was moved from sadness through the lack of acknowledgement for that. This flash was enough to change completely my intended reply of denial and justification, to an answer of welcoming his deep care for the books.

"I am really sorry to hear this. I will come with you and help you set them back in the correct place. Your library was of a great help to us and it should be of equal help to others." I said. In that moment, the words of love instead of the words of resentment connected us heart to heart. "Thanks for your offer. I can do it, but come back to consult the books whenever you need." He replied, and with that he went away with a smile. A smile was also present on my face and in my heart.

On my mind was left the acknowledgement and the joyful feeling of the incredible power of seeing beyond words with an open mind. To know that another interpretation of what goes on is possible, not only hearing the words, but sensing the situation and by having an open heart that moved from resentment for feeling attacked to caring for the person in front of me. I was really thankful for a great start to that day.

**ON MY MIND  
WAS LEFT THE  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT  
AND THE JOYFUL  
FEELING OF THE  
INCREDIBLE POWER  
OF SEEING BEYOND  
WORDS WITH AN OPEN  
MIND**

TRY TO RECALL THE MOMENT WHEN YOU PUT A SPACE BETWEEN AN INSTINCTIVE REACTION AND THE RESPONSE YOU GAVE.

HOW DID YOU FEEL AS A RESULT?

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT GIVING MORE SPACE TO COMMUNICATE FROM YOUR HEART?



# “INNER KNOWING, OR THE 5 LITERACIES OF MINDFULNESS”

*The potential of mindfulness is much more than a practice in strengthening individuals to deal with stress, regulate their emotions and become happier.*

Then most commonly used [definition of Mindfulness is the one by Jon Kabat-Zinn](#), one of the founders of secular mindfulness:

*“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, in a non-judgemental and accepting way, in the service of self-understanding and wisdom.”*

[Daniel Rechtschaffen](#) is one of the leading reference people in the field of mindfulness in education. The author of [“The Way of Mindful Education”](#) has run programs on and around mindfulness in hundreds of schools already in the US but also Europe.

*In his practice he has three strong principles:*

- 1. To cultivate mindfulness in schools, the headmaster and teachers also need to engage with the practice;*
- 2. A full program on mindfulness needs to address all “5 literacies of mindfulness”: somatic literacy (mindfulness of body); cognitive literacy (mindfulness of thoughts); emotional literacy (mindfulness of feelings); social literacy (interpersonal mindfulness); ecological literacy (mindfulness of interconnectedness).*
- 3. Any program on mindfulness should always start with somatic and cognitive literacy.*



I came across mindfulness for the first time in 2012. After five years of having lived in a small village on the coast of southern Italy, we moved back to resettle in the big city of Vienna, throwing me into great change and transformational process. Whilst also seeking for inspirations work-wise I came across Theory U, by then a very well-known model and practice for transformation processes on individual, organizational and systemic levels. In the middle of the five key phases of the Theory U process is a stage called “Presencing” – an art word combined of ‘present’ and ‘sensing’. In this phase one is invited to, “...go to the place of silence and let the inner knowing emerge.”

I was both puzzled and intrigued at the same time; I understood the words and they even resonated with me, but *how do I actually do this?* Together with other practices it was proposed to engage in a practice of mindfulness. So there I went!

At that time mindfulness for me was identical with meditation. So I started going to small retreats and seminars and developing a personal meditation practice. Sitting still on a cushion OK, but what to do with all these thoughts? And how in the best of cases, “...*emerges inner knowing?*”

After some time of practice informed by patience, acceptance and more teaching, I started to get a sense what this inner knowing could be about. Certainly I became clearer of what it is NOT: knowing generated through thinking. This is something I felt and still feel very comfortable with and drawn to, but for real transformational shifts it no longer helps by producing the same results, just in different shapes.

So I learnt to trust. I learnt to trust that my inner (or intuitive) knowledge leads me to places, to people, to activities relevant for my process right now; without a clear plan, without clear objectives yet with a clear intent.

Thereafter I wanted to bring the quality of mindfulness into schools. I made myself familiar with the “b - Mindfulness in Schools”-program (UK) and studied the work of Daniel Rechtschaffen, founder of the Mindful Education Institute in

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**I LEARNT TO TRUST  
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**WHEN MINDFULNESS  
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ONE CONNECTS AND  
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THE WORLD AROUND  
US, NEAR AND FAR**

our thoughts, a connection to intuitive or inner knowledge can appear; and then fruits such as compassion, trust, generosity, acceptance, non-judging and sense of interconnectedness can be harvested.

the US. It was through the engagement with these programs and making first experiences facilitating workshops with youngsters and teachers that I started to realize the full potential of the practice. When mindfulness beyond being a personal practice becomes an attitude; an attitude one brings ideally into all aspects of our life, it becomes a major factor in determining how one connects and interrelates with the world around us, near and far. When we manage to get some distance to the stories our mind is telling us constantly through

WHERE IS THE PLACE OF STILLNESS AND SILENCE YOU REGULARLY ATTEND TO?

HOW DO YOU RELATE TO THE STORIES YOUR THOUGHTS ARE TELLING YOU EVERY DAY?

WHERE IS YOUR SOURCE OF INTUITIVE OR INNER KNOWING?



# COUNCIL: THIRTY-EIGHT EARS SPEAK WITH ONE MOUTH

*"...what you know you can't explain, but you feel it, you've felt it your entire life. That there is something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it is there..."*

The world was not well, neither was I. Then 9/11 happened, no work, separated from a long-term relationship. I had almost literally lost my mind but was slowly recovering with help. In between panic attacks, ME symptoms and general malaise, I made a list of what I was experiencing. Part of me is always witnessing. It's like hearing or seeing, a faculty that is there all the time but mostly not used deliberately or to its full advantage. This time, it truly served. I studied the list, I walked up and down my house and realised –

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**A SIMPLE STICK WAS  
PASSED THROUGH  
EACH SET OF HANDS  
BIDDING ONE TO SPEAK  
OR NOT, NEITHER BE  
INTERRUPTED BUT  
LISTENED TO**

I'm depressed! Wow, this is what depression is... OK...

So I self-realised a label, which in this case helped, gave me a lead. Right away I entered a counter-set of words on the right side of my list. Something like;

I need to get out of here, being useful with and for other people, use my hands, have fun, be in a natural environment. Seems obvious. But if you are sick, you don't see it.

I was fortunate. The next day the universe conspired to help me. A brochure dropped through the door with a place on a work-camp in Greece. A few weeks later I arrived into a new venture holistic education centre at the edge of a

mountain chestnut forest. Eighteen other people sat in circle every morning and shared before working. Not the chit-chat, conversation, or debate common to my experience; this was a something more 'primitive'. A simple stick was passed through each set of hands bidding one to speak or not, neither be interrupted but listened to. This was not therapy nor just for entertainment, but something extraordinary and beyond the words shared that started making sense. These people, strangers, were telling the truth, telling it like it is or at least, were attempting to. Bypassing the usual social moires, there was a match of what they were saying and what I could sense was true.

I definitely felt better. I noticed stuff like; *Wow, I'm not the only one... thanks for saying that, that's what I would have said, only you did it better... that just gave me permission to say what I was feeling... I can see you, even I didn't know you from before... I'm feeling like I have a place here... This is way better than telly..! I hear myself through your story... now I get why you did that!*

This continued for some weeks. The rare experience of having a group actually pay attention to what I was saying, was a common experience here. As an 'ordinary' person I'd missed this fundamental importance for most of my life. What was wrong with the world was that everyone was playing the same game, including me. Not really listening, not really giving meaning to most of my words, judging, box-ticking, competing, categorising, comparing, filling the spaces from fear of awkwardness or looking stupid etc. But now, even my best friend sarcasm was being pushed aside so that I could listen back the way I received from others. Yeah, sometimes it was challenging, but I could see the *practice* working through me, through people over time, the trust deepening, relationships growing, the work getting done faster and with more pleasure. Even the Austrian engineer who was pretty challenged by the 'wasting time talking' started smiling and joking, having a holiday.

This practice literally changed my life, giving me direction, purpose, community and a job for life. It's not therapy but heals me slowly of disconnections in myself, others and the natural cycles. It's brought me to offer such space to others and to witness time after time the recognition found in a basic humanity, welcomed at the watering hole of council.

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**WHAT WAS  
WRONG WITH THE  
WORLD WAS THAT  
EVERYONE WAS  
PLAYING  
THE SAME GAME,  
INCLUDING ME**

**Council** is an ancient and modern practice that is finding increasing use among groups that want to move from power-over structures to a model in which initiative, responsibility and leadership are shared by everyone – a method to support group processes and personal development, for vision and clarifying purpose, decision making, honouring achievement, for reflection, conflict management, peace and reconciliation work, celebration and for discovering the deeper, often unexpressed needs of individuals and organizations. Council is our common heritage and therefor not owned by anyone, copyrighted, certified, trademarked etc. One can find cultural variations throughout the world, from using drums, singing and movement, to talking and of course listening.

Practice of council usually forms a circle, acknowledges a common centre, uses a talking/listening piece and marks the opening and closing of a 'special time' with some ceremony. E.g. lighting a candle, pouring water, opening a box or book, uncapping a pen etc – something appropriate to the common or intended culture. There are some basic agreements, e.g. WOC uses the intentions to listen from the heart or centre, express from the centre, be lean and to the point, spontaneous, and mindful of confidentiality. Not interrupting who holds the talking piece and using "I" language are also guidelines.

**"Way of Council"** is a particular thread which originates from Ojai California as a synthesis of gifted teachings from indigenous elders and leading-edge thinkers more than 35 years ago. **Way of Council (WOC)** is carried worldwide by a growing community of carriers, facilitators, trainers and elders who pass on the teachings by way of an agreed path of steps, mentoring and peer recognition.

(Source: [www.heart-source.com](http://www.heart-source.com) and [waysofcouncil.net](http://waysofcouncil.net))

WHO REALLY LISTENED TO YOU AND WHY?

WHEN YOU LISTEN, DO YOU CONFINE IT JUST TO THE EARS?

HOW DO SPEED AND EFFICIENCY BALANCE WITH TAKING ALL VIEWS INTO ACCOUNT?



# CHILDREN'S FIRE

## INTERVIEW WITH LILY ROSE SEQUOIA, AUTHOR OF THE FILM, “WETHEUNCIVILISED”

*A few years back Lily had walked away from mainstream civilisation with her partner, and while on the journey of living at the edge of society, had conceived and become parent to her daughter. Similar in story to mine with my daughter, we'd both experienced a strong need to move away from consumerism, yet found how thoroughly had we been intertwined with it... She proposes a minute of silence and gratitude together before we start the interview. We honour our personal connection and the power of women working together.*

*“The children's fire is a symbolic flame that represents Life; the life of future generations for all living beings. I learnt about the children's fire from Mac Macartney, one of the first people we interviewed for our film “wetheuncivilised” Mac was the founder of Embercombe; an inspirational community and educational centre in Devon, UK. As a young man, he'd had a Native American mentor who taught him about the ancient tradition. Within the elder's council of Native American chiefs, there would always be a flame called the children's fire to ensure no decision would go beyond that circle that did not honour all life; a pledge that every decision they would ever make would honour future generations and all living beings.*

*When I think about the children's fire, then I think about Life: whether it will thrive or not. The purpose of having that symbol is to hold as a navigational star and guiding principle; that before making any important decisions the question is; Is this decision honouring the children's fire? What kind of society is the one that wouldn't place the centre of children's fire in the centre? The answer is: an insane society.*

While we speak on of the last days of April, 2019, [the Extinction Rebellion](#) is happening on the streets of European cities, perhaps a new ray of hope for effective action upon climate change. Three years ago a grassroots film project was launched in the UK, a film screened by a couple; Lily and Pete, who made a decision to live on the road in a van to explore and show alternatives to mainstream consumer lifestyles. This is how Lily tells me the story of their last eight years;

"I met my partner in Brighton where we both had moved from London, disillusioned by the life that only offers people; a house, job, kid, retire, die, maybe with a few nice holidays in the middle of it. We were in a free-fall stage in our lives. We moved to a shared-house community and started volunteering at the permaculture trust. One day as I was having my daily run at the seaside, I saw a man sitting on his sofa reading a newspaper, drinking coffee by the truck he was living on. A little voice in my head said: *you have to go and speak to him*. I turned back and approached him asking how was it to live on a truck. He said, "You just buy a truck and you live" Next week we found ourselves on a train heading to buy our truck. We got married with a big ceremony, then we moved into our truck in August 2011. That was the beginning of a journey we could never have anticipated. We catapulted into a different community, at the edge of society. Suddenly the walls of our home became thinner, and we got closer to everything.

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## **SUDDENLY THE WALLS OF OUR HOME BECAME THINNER, AND WE GOT CLOSER TO EVERYTHING**

The community of trucks were really friendly, you could always knock at a neighbour if you needed something. Living in that environment brought us into direct contact with many things; how do we deal with our waste? How do we go to the toilet without a toilet? How do we deal with the community with all of its human challenges? We had a single solar panel to generate electricity to run our computer on. We used candlelight. We had to think about how much power we needed everyday. We had made the conscious choice to move there out of a sense of responsibility as a political decision. We wanted to find a different way of engaging with life.

We borrowed some money to buy a second-hand camera, and sent out emails to change-makers, pioneers like Satish Kumar, Polly Higgins, Mac Macartney, asking them if we could interview them. Soon we got a few replies and off we went. We first visited Embercomb, then many other alternative communities across the country. We arrived to Devon at Imbolc, the time of new beginning, with the tiny hazel blossoms that just popped out. This was the time when our daughter was conceived. There we learnt about two important things that became key to our film; the children's fire and the Celtic medicine wheel. We structured the film following nature's cycles, based on our enquiry: *What could another world look like?* Making the film was a long journey, a huge undertaking, a project funded by crowdfunding campaigns. It took over three years to edit in our bus, powered by one single solar panel, while grappling with our new role as parents.

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## **WE ARRIVED TO DEVON AT IMBOLC, THE TIME OF NEW BEGINNING, WITH THE TINY HAZEL BLOSSOMS THAT JUST POPPED OUT. THIS WAS THE TIME WHEN OUR DAUGHTER WAS CONCEIVED**

In Summer 2016, right after releasing the film, we toured the UK with our newborn baby in our bus fuelled entirely on biofuel. We wanted people watching the film to share their most important learning with others. We wanted to galvanise communities of people who



lived on the edge land. We wanted to create human connection through the film. We created a solar cinema and workshop space. Our intention was to take that space to different communities as a sacred space. To build community, connecting to one another, to ourselves and to the more than human world. We shared the film with over 2000 people, at over 50 venues from festivals to church halls, independent Cinemas to off-grid yurts, raising money for local community projects. While touring the film we went back to the communities where we made it. What became clear during the screenings is that the film brought up a lot of feelings in people, we had strong emotional responses and needed to find a way to support people with that. These communities were left after the screenings with an opened heart not knowing how to integrate those feelings. We wanted to give a tool to them to integrate and use these realisations and learnings for their local community.

So we created “fire circles”; a community that holds the fire in the centre. The invitation is that once a community watches the film; have a sharing circle, and then set a fire at the centre. They would meet regularly to look at; *How are we honouring the children’s fire in our lives? How can we support each other to honour that more often in our decisions?*

In this country many people are doing great things, [Transition Towns](#) grow, local community gardens, no plastic shops, etc, but no one talks about the actual human experience of living at this time on Earth. How do we navigate through paradoxes and contradictions of life? What is moving in you that motivates you to do those things? How can we get together as a community and be more effective in moving towards change? The fire circles allow those conversations to happen. To me this opening is important; if I can be there with another human being without all those masks, if we are just together; then I feel a deep connection, I understand them, I want to work with them. Being connected increases my efficiency in a community.

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**WHAT BECAME  
CLEAR DURING  
THE SCREENINGS  
IS THAT THE FILM  
BROUGHT UP A LOT  
OF FEELINGS IN  
PEOPLE**

The truth is that it does not only matter how much are you composting, how do you garden or reduce your waste; there needs to be a change at a systems level,

## HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE AND ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD?

and a change of the inner dimension. When I sit with people and ask them, *how do you feel when you think about the future and about what is happening in the world?* - on that basic level, there is a human response from the inner world of that person. Then there is a seed of real connection. That's the point, this is why we are here: to make change happen, to support Life in all forms."

During that hour-and-a-half, while we talked, there were no interrupting phone calls, not even a single new email in my inbox that whole time. Life stopped for a while and listened to us connect and share. I listened to the story of Lily and got inspired to start a fire circle locally.

WHAT WOULD THE WORLD LOOK LIKE IF ALL COMMUNITIES, ALL GOVERNMENTS ONLY TOOK DECISIONS THAT HONOUR THIS CHILDREN'S FIRE?

HOW DO I TAKE ALL FUTURE GENERATIONS INTO ACCOUNT IN MY DECISIONS?

HOW DO I HONOUR THE CHILDREN'S FIRE IN MY LIFE?

HOW CAN I SUPPORT OTHERS AROUND ME TO HONOUR THIS MORE OFTEN IN THEIR LIVES?

HOW CAN I USE THIS APPROACH IN MY WORK, AND HOW CAN I HELP PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES WITH THIS PRACTICE?



www.wetheuncivilised

# HOW DO I BRING MY GIFT TO THE WORLD?

*How can we create our personal sustainability and contribute to a greater collective sustainability by bringing our special gift to the world? How can we follow our hearts? How can we create opportunities to be paid for what we love doing?*

*I planned to make interviews with two women I know and write an article called, "Women who dare to bring their gifts to the world." Both of them had left their well-paid jobs in the corporate world, one of them to establish an eco-festival and move to the countryside to build her own self-sufficient farm in Hungary. The other lady obtained a caravan and travelled across the UK to make a film on an alternative future, while being pregnant with her first child. I approached both a few times for an interview, yet couldn't reach either of them yet. Now two days past the deadline to send in this article, I must write about a woman who dares to bring her passion to the world...*

What is it you really wish to bring to the world?

What is it that you really truly love?

What is it that makes your heart sing?

Work is LOVE in action



I grew up a really creative child, one of those freaks always in the midst of designing something and having an entire DIY workshop around her school desk. I was happiest when left alone and could create something; painting, drawing, making fashion design, sculpting, binding books, weaving wool, practising mirror writing and composing deliberately nonsensical poems.

From age twenty and during university, I studied adult learning and was infused with the culture of “life-long learning.” I learnt that the idea of staying in the same job for a lifetime is over; that in our modern times one must learn and develop her competencies continuously.

By twenty-five, I was already working for ecological nonprofit organisations, undergoing a few years of training in non-formal education and establishing and leading an environmental educational centre. I’d trained up for being a youth worker, and was just about to begin my kundalini yoga teacher training when I became aware of the personality type called “scanners.” I recognised I was one of them. Scanners are people who like to explore everything, try out many different careers and who refuse to choose. A wise man advised me that is was OK to learn new things, but I had to be careful not to use this to fuel my belief of, “...not being enough.” He said, “Use up everything you’ve learnt as ingredients and make a tasty meal out of them.”

Thirty and living in Cambridge, I met the culture of intentional communities, the Transition Towns movement, and attended my first [‘Work That Reconnects’](#) workshop. The opening question was, “*What makes your heart sing?*” I remembered a wishful image I’ve held since childhood; that if only we could make a shift on the huge gearwheel of global professions, each gear to find a new place, click in so that each and everyone in the world would do the work that makes them happy. Then, the world would be a different place! We need only to find what makes our heart sing and make this gear shift.

At thirty-five I was working with a brilliant young woman who led the production of a deck of cards called, [“The Unsticking Game”](#) It was designed to help people in finding their authentic profession, to help them get unstuck in a career-related turning point. Yes, she was another woman who dared to bring her gift to the world, now working as an Integral Approach coach to support people finding life direction.

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**WE NEED ONLY TO  
FIND WHAT MAKES  
OUR HEART SING  
AND MAKE THIS  
GEAR SHIFT**

Another step in the journey, a longer and not so bright one in 2015 occurred when in a breaking relationship, I gave birth to my second daughter. She was only six months old when in hope of keeping the family together by becoming the breadwinner, I took a manager's job and we moved to the other side of the country. I was supposed to manage a newly-opened Eco Tourism Center within a rural environment in southern Hungary, while my husband took parental leave. My immediate boss promised that I would have free hands to do whatever I wanted to run the Center. I had a new, EU project-funded eco building, in a beautiful natural environment to manage, but... I had to fit into a traditional rural post-communist hierarchic power system. In this village no-one had ever heard of collaborative ways of working, decision making, community-run projects or open communication methods, let alone the [four levels of listening](#) or simply really listening without prejudice.

Management recruited two colleagues that I was supposed to handle. I called them for a collaborative design process to plan our educational programmes, but after a full day of facilitated work with both local guys still sitting there unwillingly, they finally asked me *why wouldn't I simply tell them what to do and leave them to get on with their jobs?* Later, I designed a huge mindmap of potential directions, functions of the Center and stuck it to the wall. This resulted in tourists taking more photos of my poster than of the place itself, yet still no clarity from the decision-making level (my direct managers a.k.a. local government) or my underlings for where I was coming from and what kind of work culture I wanted to create. I found myself again a freak like in my early school years, having no matching playmates. Besides that I was breastfeeding an eight-month-old baby waking me up 6-8 times a night, and desperately trying to keep up during the

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**OF THAT WALK, AS  
I SPIRALLED OUT  
FROM THE CENTRE, A  
NEW PROJECT GREW;  
THE DREAM OF AN  
INTERNATIONAL  
SUPPORT NETWORK  
FOR MOTHERS**

days. Being confronted with problems at work on such a fundamentally structural level, I decided to leave. I entered a period of deep struggle and not-knowing, alone with no source of income, trying to find my feet on the ground again. I had no interest to bring my gifts but just wishing to survive day by day. Yet together with many discoveries along my path as a new mother, I somehow intuited that this new perspective would bring me important learning.

I have always been blessed with having interesting friends. On All-Saints Day in 2016, I was invited by Helena to walk a labyrinth in the Czech aablic. The instruction this time was to think about someone else rather than myself while walking the labyrinth. It was a strong incentive. Of that walk, as I spiralled out from the centre, a new project grew; the dream of an international support network for mothers. Now here I am in 2019 coordinating an international partnership aiming to support mothers in their personal transformation, Nature connection and realigning their lifepath to what really matters to them. We are working in a truly collaborative environment, using sociocratic decision making, collaborative work, building real connections and working on what our heart whispers us to do.

Recently working within this team I had an AHA moment: it is no problem that I can only do eighty-per cent in many things, but no hundred-per cent in any single thing. This is where my aspiration for working within a community springs up; I need others to be, I need others to do. Immediately I experienced the power of community, as my colleague Lara replied looking right into my eyes "Agi, you are doing this project, one hundred per cent!"

**I EXPERIENCED  
THE POWER OF  
COMMUNITY, AS  
MY COLLEAGUE  
LARA REPLIED  
LOOKING RIGHT  
INTO MY EYES "AGI,  
YOU ARE DOING  
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HUNDRED PER  
CENT!"**

IF THERE WAS NOTHING TO STOP YOU, WHAT WOULD YOU DO AS YOUR UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO THE HEALING OF OUR WORLD?

WHAT ARE THE RESOURCES YOU ALREADY HAVE TO BRING THIS GIFT OF YOURS TO THE WORLD?

HOW WOULD YOU STOP/SABOTAGE YOURSELF FROM DOING IT? HOW WOULD YOU OVERCOME THESE?

THE QUESTIONS ARE BASED ON JOANNA MACY'S EXERCISE GOALS AND RESOURCES IN "COMING BACK TO LIFE - PRACTICES TO RECONNECT OUR LIFE OUR WORLD"



# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

## KASIA STEPIEN

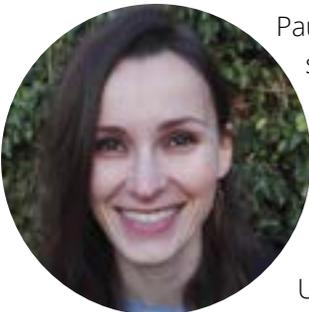


Kasia weaves together her passion for embodied practices, nature and communities, inspiring mindful re-connection with self, others and the Earth. She is a certified 5Elements Dance Activation facilitator, mindfulness practitioner, explorer and activist. In her work, she creates heart-based spaces supporting young people and adults on their journeys to wholeness, based on compassion, authentic expression, self-awareness and play.

Currently, she is working as a freelance facilitator and project manager for ASHA foundation, a holistic education centre in the Forest of Dean, UK.

Kasia is part of ASHA Centre, in the UK: [ashacentre.org](http://ashacentre.org)

## PAULINA ŁUŻECKA



Paulina Łużeczka is passionate about building a sustainable future by inspiring hope and supporting people to live up to their highest potential, as well as analysing structural problems and developing solutions: she does this through a combination of education, writing and research. She holds a PhD in Environment, Energy and Resilience from the University of Exeter and currently works for the Asha Centre, a holistic education organization based in the Forest of Dean, UK.

Paulina is part of ASHA Centre, in the UK: [ashacentre.org](http://ashacentre.org)

## DEBORA T. STENTA



My formal education includes Degrees in Classics and MusicArtTherapy.

After quitting safe jobs as Project Manager in NGOs and other non-profit organizations, I have been a dancer/musician/artist and traveller for many years.

Motherhood brought a multi-dimensional research on everything concerning childhood: analogical thinking, wilderness, spontaneous and undisturbed processes, unlearning paths, self-led learning, spirituality, nature.

At the moment I serve as doula/birth-keeper, group facilitator, consultant.

Debora is part of Casa del cuculo, in Italy: [casadelcuculo.org](http://casadelcuculo.org)

## SARA GALEOTTI



Sara is a facilitator, graphic designer and a mother. She lives in a shared house with two other families in the beautiful hills of Emilia-Romagna, Italy. She loves drawing, fermenting foods and growing her garden. She works for Casa del Cuculo, the 4-people-cooperative she founded in 2010 and has the same name as the house she is living in.

Sara is part of Casa del cuculo, in Italy: [casadelcuculo.org](http://casadelcuculo.org)

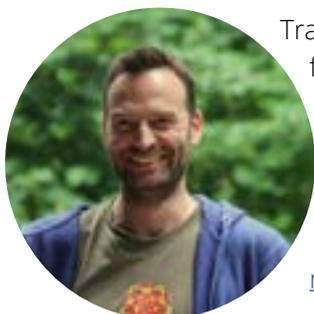
## HELENA KOSKOVÁ



Trainer, nature guide and facilitator of rituals and group processes within the Natural Spirit platform. Gardening apprentice. You can often find her walking, exploring diverse forms of pilgrimage or sitting with others in circle, listening to stories and collective wisdom.

Helena is part of Čia Čekija, in Czechia: [www.naturalspirit.cz](http://www.naturalspirit.cz)

## HONZA LÁTAL



Trainer, facilitator, ritual designer and nature guide from South Bohemia. Interested in religions, cultures, archaeology, astronomy and experimental music. His speciality is connecting nature, art and spirituality in learning.

Honza is part of NGO Čia Čekija, in Czechia: [www.naturalspirit.cz](http://www.naturalspirit.cz)

## JANA STARÁ



Jana Stará, PhD. is a wellness promoter who has dedicated her research and teaching practice to promoting the concept of wellness in her country. She is interested in finding ways of how to develop and implement wellness programs with respect to different cultural environments and traditions in Europe. She teaches at the university, facilitates training courses and believes that better times for European wellness are yet to come.

Jana is part of Čia Čekija, in Czechia: [www.naturalspirit.cz](http://www.naturalspirit.cz)

## ŠIMON GRIMMICH



Meditation and mindfulness teacher, translator, poet and wanderer; fascinated by the connection between poetry, being in the present moment and spirituality. Meditation is for me a way toward myself, toward others and toward wonder at the miracle of life.

Šimon is part of Vnitřní prosto, in Czechia: [www.vnitrniprostor.cz](http://www.vnitrniprostor.cz)

## GYULA SZABÓ



Living and working as a part of a circle; this is what I am looking for myself, my community and my Planet. After having completed degrees in Economics and History and experiencing the world of corporate communication, I now work as a green-living coach and trainer at Ökoszolgalat Alapítvány (Ecoservice Foundation). I am a Council facilitator working with different groups of people in both business and education. I live with my family in an eco house in Budaörs, Hungary.

Gyula is part of Ecoservice foundation, in Hungary: [okoszolgalat.hu](http://okoszolgalat.hu)

## ROB DREAMING



Rob is an international Facilitator, Mentor and Trainer in Way of Council, 17 years leading council practice, and a SOLB trained wilderness guide, mentored by Gigi Coyle (Ojai Foundation Trainer & author of Way of Council). With over 18 years experience facilitating groups, coaching individuals, designing and running trainings in the areas of consciousness and communication, he is also a poet and has had published 4 children's books.

Rob is part of Ecoservice foundation, in Hungary: [okoszolgalat.hu](http://okoszolgalat.hu)

## PAOLA BORTINI



In the last 25 years, it has been fascinating to strengthen people and organizations throughout Europe, to support them in liminal phases in learning from / for the future with creativity. At the centre of my methodical approach is above all mindfulness, the Theory U by Otto Scharmer - and his team from the Presencing Institute -, "wilderness" nature work and pure essential oils. Born in Italy, I lived and worked in many countries. Currently living in Austria with my family.

With many years of meditation practice, trained in Mindful Self compassion, MBSR, Mindful Parenting by Jon and Myla Kabat-Zinn, Insight Dialogue, the Way of Council. certified Emotion Mentor with Rebecca Linder Hintze and Aromacoach; trained in Theory U and Social Presencing Theater with Arawana Hayashi.

Paola is part of Limina, in Austria: [www.limina.at](http://www.limina.at)

## PETER HOFMANN



With his expertise in designing and facilitating learning and dialogue spaces for small groups and teams; big groups and conferences; Peter has worked for supranational institutions as well as for many non-governmental organisations for over 15 years.

Inspired several years ago by Theory U he began to engage in and with mindfulness, particularly in the field of education. He is now a trained facilitator in both mindfulness and Social Presencing Theatre.

Peter is part of Limina, in Austria: [www.limina.at](http://www.limina.at)

## AGI BERE CZ



Agi has worked in environmental education since 2004, mainly in the fields of youth work and adult learning for sustainability. Being inspired by ecopsychology, deep ecology and the path of yoga, her interest has been shifting from the outer to the inner dimensions of personal transformation towards a life-sustaining society. She lives in a Hungarian village, teaches yoga, studies integral psychology and above all is the mother of two young girls. The immersion to motherhood made her conscious about how becoming a mother and raising children are the foremost sources of personal transformation and connectedness to our earthy Mother. [Mother Nature](#) is a project she set up with colleagues that currently works as an international support community for mothers.

Agi is part of Pandora, in Hungary: [pandora.org.hu](http://pandora.org.hu)

## SANTA KRASIŅA



Santa has more than 10 years of experience in the NGO sector. Has implemented educational activities for the society on a sustainable, environmentally friendly way of life, encouraging to take responsibility and participate in the improvement of its environment.

Santa is part of Zaļā brīvība, in Latvia: [zalabriviba.lv](http://zalabriviba.lv)

## KRISZTINA PÁSZTOR



Trainer and facilitator of nature-based practices, passionate about holding space for groups throughout the process of outdoor transformative experiences.

Council facilitator, gardener, permaculturist, lover of forests.

Kriszta is part of Pandora, in Hungary: [pandora.org.hu](http://pandora.org.hu)

## ILZE JĒČE



Ilze Jēče is social change facilitator and movement and bodywork educator with years of experience in social and environmental activism. In the training courses she integrates movement, bodywork, acrobatics and various pedagogical tools to create a playful and inspiring learning process.

Ilze is part of Zaļā brīvība, in Latvia: [zalabriviba.lv](http://zalabriviba.lv)

## EVIJA RUDZĪTE



I believe that all good things come from good people, therefore a way to make world better is to allow people to be better. Non-formal learning allows people to become aware of the freedom and resources they have and this, to my mind, leads to better people. So, this is what I do..

Evija is part of Zaļā brīvība, in Latvia: [zalabriviba.lv](http://zalabriviba.lv)

# ORGANIZATIONS

## CASA DEL CUCULO



Casa del cuculo is a cooperative based in Emilia-Romagna, Italy, founded in 2010 by 4 people who have been researching and experimenting together on the theme of community building and social research through non-formal methods.

Website: [www.casadelcuculo.org](http://www.casadelcuculo.org)

## GREEN LIBERTY - ZAĻĀ BRĪVĪBA



Zaļā brīvība

Green Liberty (Zaļā Brīvība) was founded in 1991 and registered as a non-profit NGO in 1993. Green Liberty's mission is to develop a society where people live in harmony with each other and their environment. Green Liberty aims at informing people about social and environmental implications of current trends in consumerism, trade and globalization; empowering people to

make meaningful decisions connected with their lives directly and indirectly; opposing abuses of power.

Website: [www.zalabriviba.lv](http://www.zalabriviba.lv)

## LIMINA



Limina supports people and organisations to learn in and from phases of transition by providing educational activities aimed at developing the liminal competences. LIMINA designs learning spaces and experiences to allow for new perspectives, pathways and

opportunities to successfully engage with transition and change processes, that are often dominated by uncertainty and ambiguity. Our approach is based on 3 keywords: exploring, engaging and emerging.

Website: [www.limina.at](http://www.limina.at)

## ČIA ČEKIJA



In 2011 we established Čia Čekija, initiated by young people, former participants of our activities. Aim of our association is the development of competencies of young people from socio-economically difficult

environments. We work towards this aim through activities of nonformal education, leisure time activities and support of volunteering.

Website: [www.naturalspirit.cz](http://www.naturalspirit.cz)

## PANDORA ASSOCIATION



Pandora Association was founded in 2012, initiated by people who had had several years of work experience in the fields of learning for sustainability, working within the European Youth In Action Programme, and non-formal education. We are a non-profit association (NGO) operating within local contexts as well as on regional, national and European level. We focus on learning that supports the inner dimension of change, to

connect with ourselves, each other and the more than human world.

Website: [pandora.org.hu](http://pandora.org.hu)

## THE ECOSERVICE FOUNDATION



The Ecoservice Foundation is the first green living coaching NGO in Hungary founded in 1991.

Counseling, lectures, trainings, workshops for schools, individuals, communities, companies about holistic green lifestyle change. We believe that it is important to get to know the world around us for a successful change. We need to find the inner harmony, we need to take care of our personal well-being, we need to re-connect to Nature and then come to the eco practices - how, when and what to change our way of life.

Website: [www.facebook.com/zoldzug.hu](http://www.facebook.com/zoldzug.hu)

## THE ASHA FOUNDATION



**ASHA CENTRE**  
INSPIRATION • CONNECTION • PURPOSE

The ASHA Foundation is a British educational charity working for the empowerment of young people worldwide. Our core belief is that unlocking the

human potential and inherent goodness in young people is vital for our world today. Our mission is to create an educational environment in which young people can experience a sense of inspiration, connection and purpose.

Website: [ashacentre.org](http://ashacentre.org)

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

## INNER PATHWAYS TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY - INNOVATIVE APPROACHES IN LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY



**INNER PATHWAYS  
TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY**

How and when does change happen in a person that begins to live mindfully on the Earth? What is the interplay of inner and outer dimensions of such transformation?

Through where leads the inner pathway toward sustainability, and what further external support is needed until this change becomes permanent and manifesting on the level of actions?

These and many other guiding questions are at the core of this project.

Inner Pathways toward Sustainability aims to closely examine concrete methods, theories and practices that involve “Heart, Head and Hands” applications that lead to the change in a person towards a sustainable lifestyle.

## WHAT IS THE ‘INNER PATHWAYS TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY’ PROJECT?

An international learning partnership of seven organisations from Austria, Czechia, Latvia, Hungary, Italy and UK, coordinated by Pandora Association from Hungary. The project runs in all six countries for 27 months, and began in September 2018.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

The project is an international platform for educators, trainers, facilitators of learning for sustainability, community leaders, and people that would like to make a sustainable change in their environment and the world.

## WHAT ARE WE DOING?

We aim to bridge approaches and practices that are related to human development in the field of personal, societal and natural sustainability. We will explore and collect practices and stories that can enlighten daily actions and human behaviour, so to create a better world both for ourselves and others.

## WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT?

The project is working on a set of tools and resources that can facilitate the inner pathways toward sustainability.

The outcomes are:

- a training manual
- a training curriculum
- audio podcasts
- a research available from the project's website (from June, 2020) in English, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, German, Czech.

# CALL FOR ACTION!

We offer the opportunity for people to take part in a long-term professional self-reflection and mentoring course between January-April, 2020. As part of this process you can take part in an international professional 8-days training course in March 2020:

## “FRUITS OF INNER PATHWAYS TRAIN THE TRAINERS”

An international residential course open to trainers, facilitators, community leaders and organisers from Austria, Hungary, Latvia, Italy, and UK, in Hungary, March 2020.

The course will be facilitated by the team of trainers of the Inner Pathways Project. The course offers new tools for trainers in the field of learning for sustainability. The programme will be based on the 4 fields, practices and learning methods of the Inner Pathways approach.

Look for more information: [www.innerpathways.eu](http://www.innerpathways.eu)



# RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

## Books

Jain Manish, Jain Shipa, *Reclaiming the Gift Culture, Vimukt Shiksha – a Bulletin of Shikshantar*, 2008

Macy Joanna, Brown Molly Young, *Coming back to life: The updated guide to The Work that Reconnects*, New society publisher, 2014

Travis, John W., Ryan, Regina Sara, *Wellness Workbook: How to Achieve Enduring Health and Vitality*, Ten Speed Press, 2004

Eisenstein, Charles, *Sacred Economics*, Evolver Editions, 2011

Eisenstein, Charles, *The more beautiful world our hearts know is possible*, North Atlantic Books, Berkley, California, 2013

Liedloff, Jean, *The continuum concept*, Duckworth, 1975

Odent, Michel, *From Homo Superpredator to Homo Ecologicus* on [www.wombecology.com](http://www.wombecology.com)

Odent, Michel, *The Farmer and the Obstetrician*, Free Association Books, 2002

Thich Nhat Hahn, *The Sun my Heart*, Rider, 1982

Thich Nhat Hahn, *The World We Have*, Parallax press, 2008

Thich Nhat Hahn, *Love Letter to the Earth*, Parallax press, 2012

Thich Nhat Hahn, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, Ebury Publishing, 2008

## ONLINE RESOURCES

<https://humaneeducation.org/>

Becton Loveless, Holistic Education: A Comprehensive Guide" in Education Corner, <https://www.educationcorner.com/holistic-education.html> (accessed 22.04.2019)

<https://strozziinstitute.com/>

[www.theheartofchange.eu/hu/the-unsticking-game/](http://www.theheartofchange.eu/hu/the-unsticking-game/)

<https://mothernatureproject.org>

<https://wetheuncivilised.org/set-up-a-firecircle/>

<http://www.soulcraft.co/essays/ecopsychology.html>

[www.arawanahayashi.com](http://www.arawanahayashi.com)

[www.presecing.com](http://www.presecing.com)

[www.sourcetoyou.com](http://www.sourcetoyou.com)

[www.mydoterra.com/limina](http://www.mydoterra.com/limina)

[www.heart-source.com](http://www.heart-source.com)

<http://waysofcouncil.net>

[http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20190329-the-ancient-guardians-of-the-earth?ocid=ww.social.link.facebook&fbclid=IwAR2BNXPw9rLHSg\\_8BoSYwagGF67yhRyt6y88zD5-6iHKSTkvJwsHbnoW-o0](http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20190329-the-ancient-guardians-of-the-earth?ocid=ww.social.link.facebook&fbclid=IwAR2BNXPw9rLHSg_8BoSYwagGF67yhRyt6y88zD5-6iHKSTkvJwsHbnoW-o0)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine\\_wheel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine_wheel)

<http://sociocracy30.intranzitie.org/>

<https://sociocracy30.org/>

[www.sociocracyforall.org/](http://www.sociocracyforall.org/)

<http://sociocracy30.intranzitie.org/>

[www.plumvillage.org](http://www.plumvillage.org)

[www.plumvillage.uk](http://www.plumvillage.uk)

5 Mindfulness Trainings: <https://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/the-5-mindfulness-trainings/>

[www.inmyelements.com](http://www.inmyelements.com)

<http://www.timsheppard.co.uk/story/>

<http://ethicalstorytelling.com/resources/>

<https://storynet.org/resources/>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storytelling>

[www.beyondintractability.org](http://www.beyondintractability.org)



We are a group of trainers, facilitators and educators from seven European countries.

**What unites us is a common vision for a better world, a sustainable future where humanity can thrive in harmony with all Life.**

We believe that a transition to such a future is possible, and that an inner transformation is its key component.

**This volume contains stories of our own inner pathways: the practices, tools and experiences that shaped us and guided us on our individual journeys.**

