

# Collective Trauma: Healing the Unintegrated Past



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### Collective Trauma: Healing the Unintegrated Past

Diane Poole Heller:

Hi everybody, and thank you for joining us. I'm really excited to have this special time with Thomas Hübl about his new book coming out, *Healing Collective Trauma*. I know by the time you see this, it's already possible to get it through Amazon. I finished this book just recently, and it's absolutely the most needed information for our times, as far as I'm concerned. It's a really a beautiful piece of work, Thomas. Thank you so much for writing this to us. I want to welcome you to this interview. We're so happy to be able to have this special time with you, all the way from Tel Aviv.

Thomas Hübl: Yeah, thank you. Me too. I'm looking forward to our conversations. It's beautiful. Thank you. Thank you.

Diane: Well, there're so many different directions I want to drill down with you. One is I love it that you're based in Israel, it's one of my favorite places on the planet. The last time I was there was for an international trauma conference, and we were doing trauma trainings there. It was at that unusual time in history when Bill Clinton had worked out at least a hopeful peace agreement with Arafat and Israel. And as I got on the plane, I was moving into a peaceful situation, but by the time I landed in Ben Gurion, that had fallen apart, and there was a lot of upset and violence unfolding, and some of the things that we're going to be touching into how it connects to collective trauma today.

Thomas: For sure. Yeah, for sure. That's a reality, yeah. Of course.

Diane: I love Israel, though. I've always been talking about how I really value connection and community. I've been preaching that for many, many years. I'm feeling a little bit like it's a little hard to have sometimes. But as soon as they opened the airplane door at Ben Gurion, I felt this sense of community. I just felt this holding for that. My husband at the time, he said, "This is what you're talking about." He could feel it too. So there's something palpable about that there. I'm so glad that you get a chance to dwell there most of the time.

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Thomas: Yeah, yeah. Now I was here, I didn't travel since, I don't know, almost a year because of COVID, so I couldn't fly out. So I'm here really now for a long time. Yeah, that's right.

Diane: Well, I just want to tell everybody that's joining our call, we already highlighted Thomas's new book in our January newsletter, and we're highlighting it again with this interview that's such a special experience in our February newsletter. We're also starting a course on collective trauma, because Thomas's work and my own experience has really been calling me to say more about it and give us a sense of what that is and how we can participate. They'll be starting in November 2021.

Thomas is a teacher, a renowned author. He's been the founder of the Academy of Inner Science. He combines an understanding of individual trauma, ancestral trauma, intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and then takes it another huge step into, how do we hold this and possibly digest some of the dark bigger societal issues in groups or how do we hold that space? How do we mature ourselves enough and do our own work enough that we have this within us to be able to move in this direction? So, it's a wonderful contribution.

I know you said something in your book about how this started to unfold for you several years ago now, probably a few decades ago, that you were doing these huge, these lovely workshops, and then all of a sudden one of the groups got safe enough and there was enough coherence, there would be this arising of undigested cultural trauma or historical trauma. I'd love to have you say a little bit about that.

Thomas: Yeah, no, it's exactly as you said. We had these groups, we started also in Germany and the German-speaking part of Europe. And it's exactly as you said, we came together, we did some presencing and some relational exercises. In the moment there was enough coherence, massive eruptions of the Second World War material and the Holocaust material came up. It was really a very strong process. It took us a few days to work through this. Usually that happened, in week-long retreats, on day three or four.

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But the interesting thing was that it kept happening again and again to completely different people. Then I thought, wow, there is some kind of more archetypal process design. Something shows itself, that in the book I describe as the CTIP, this Collective Trauma Integration Process. So, there are certain waves that those processes go through. Since they kept happening again and again, I started to describe them. Then, after some time, we did the work in Israel, and then Israel and Germany together, we did international retreats also here in Israel with many people coming from outside. Then we started to do similar work in the US, and then also in other parts of the world, and applied this similar, the core design of the process, to different, what we call local voices.

So there's the universal trauma response that, I mean, you know very well and most probably many of the people that are listening. But then there is the specificity and the universal. So, we are working with these two forces, what is more universal and what is specific to the trauma of Israel, Germany, the US, whatever, Argentina or Rwanda. Yeah, so that's, in a nutshell, the process we discovered.

Diane:

Well, I think it's such a huge thing because I taught for 13 to 15 years in Germany, and then somewhat in Israel also. But in Germany, I found that as our groups solidified, we would often have second generation people that had been in the Nazi situation and people that had been in the Holocaust situation. Like you said, as the safety happens, we worked with it a little bit more individually, but then also as a group, when both of these dynamics would show up in the trainings. It was so beautiful to see what could happen. I mean, this is my little tiny experience of what you're doing regularly, so it just helps me connect to it, but I find it so powerful and so needed then.

You talk about it so articulately in the book, about how if we don't metabolize trauma, whether it's individual or collective, it just keeps replaying. It's so often so much of an unconscious process, and it's natural biologically that we disconnect, we dissociate, we deny. Then what I thought was so impactful, partly about what you were writing about this

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is that you really hold the group with well-trained facilitators and people that have done their deep work, of course, it takes that. You helped the safety and coherence formulate through all these practices, meditations, presencing exercises, dialogues. Then you can actually hold these really strong, powerful forces that come up. But a big part of it is being able to stay with the discomfort and the dissociative fog that happens anytime we try to touch something that's felt overwhelming or untouchable.

Thomas: That's right. You described it beautifully, that there is this kind of fog, and every time we come closer to the collective trauma layers, we touch first the collective dissociation. That feels really terrible. You want to leave the room. Many people get tired. You feel all the avoidance power, how we keep that tremendous pain unconscious. But if we manage to stay present to that phase, then usually there is a very different phase afterwards where a lot of material shows up. But I think what you described, and that's why I often say we are living in a time where we are driving our car on a late autumn morning, when there is a foggy landscape, and you're driving through the landscape, but you don't see so far. Because of the fog, you need to slow down.

That fogginess that I saw in the groups, it was very clear to me: wow, we are living in the same fog all the time. It's not only happening in the groups. We just take the spotlight of consciousness and turn it towards that fog, and then we feel it. But in our nervous systems, that kind of collective denial and pain is all the time present. It's literally like when you drive your car in the morning and you just see 50 meters, then when the fog clears up, then you suddenly see five kilometers and you drive very differently. So, how does our society look like when we are all the time in that fog, but we don't see the fog?

That's the issue with trauma is we don't see it. We just see symptoms all around—societal symptoms, like we saw it now in the election process, and with racism and othering and fragmentation and polarization. But on the other hand, there is this invisible fog. I am very interested in how we create more and more awareness of the collective trauma field, that we

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are literally all the time in that fog, but without knowing. Because to us, it looks like, okay, that's the world. You have been born into fog and you lived your whole life in a foggy landscape, so fog is normal.

Diane: Right, you think that is all there is.

Thomas: That's how the world looks like, yeah.

Diane: You so artfully bring curiosity to the fog. I remember I was working with a Tulku, actually, but something about the trauma he was working on just personally, it felt like there was Ambien in the air. I felt like there was this sleep potion in the air. I was starting to have to pinch myself not to fall asleep. I could see he was in this clouded place. But all we had to do was say, I said to him, "It's so interesting. It feels like there's a sleep drug in the room. I can feel it, and I'm wondering if you're aware of it at all." As soon as I said something, and he's got this really mature consciousness, he goes, "Yeah, definitely."

As soon as we acknowledged it, it was a little uncomfortable briefly, but then this truth or awareness or whatever it was, presence, popped it, and then we had this incredibly pristine clarity to move through whatever it was that issue was about. I think you're doing that in this so skillful way with hundreds or a 1,000 people at a time. With all my understanding about trauma, I've been working with trauma since 1987, I just feel this is so, so important. I get it pretty deeply on an individual level, but where you're taking it is so masterful and important and needed.

Thomas: Yeah. It's exactly as you said, that they're ... In the moment you bring awareness to the denial, you bring awareness to the dissociating—the process—and if we can be that precise in our capacity to relate, so what you did is you were just precise to name the real thing that was happening. I think when we get that as groups, that, in a group, I'm not listening to somebody's processes as audience. I'm participating always in the person's process. That's what it means to be also just a citizen. I'm a participant in

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the process. I am not just an audience in what's happening, that's trauma. But that I am an alive, engaged and related participant in the process that's unfolding. I'm in it.

Often, the dissociated denial or bystanding, or indifference, or not feeling, I often say just that we need to ask each other what we are feeling is already being part of a traumatized society. That we don't feel each other, that my body doesn't feel your body, or my emotions your emotions—that's a natural thing. But since it's not that natural, the norm became that we mentally analyze each other's inner physical and emotional states instead of feeling them directly. So, all of this is part of that fog that became a normal world. I think it's, as you said before, that once we can name that that world is not normal, but traumatized to a certain extent, and that we see in our society structures that are frozen; these are not societal structures, it is ice. It's the hostage that lives in the past. Trauma is a hostage of the past. If we can bring more attention to, and be precise with what we are relating to, as you did in the example, I think that's one of the remedies, actually, that we are looking for.

Diane:

It's funny because when I remember that session, my first impulse was to pinch myself to try to stay present in the midst of the fog. But I was a little embarrassed to bring his attention to it because I thought he might take it wrong. I thought, how can I say this to invite curiosity? Immediately he was like, "Yeah, you're right." I mean, it's just like learning how to bring attention to something where the attention doesn't really want to go of its own. That's what I heard you doing in the book over and over again. That was so, so beautiful.

The other thing that I think is so important, I talk about this in my group sometimes, is that we have the whole group nervous system to process something. It doesn't have to just be one-on-one. There's a big shift to the whole body of people. Even if there's one or two people that can't quite go there, there's enough people that can, that's able to hold the dark places and eventually begin to move them ... Darkness can't stand up to light. I mean, if you put a flashlight in the dark room, the darkness doesn't have a

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chance. So, it is this inherent reality of what humans have access to if we just know how to align with it. That's what I think you're bringing people aware in such a beautiful way.

Thomas: Right. That's exactly what I meant before, also, that you've framed differently, how we are all becoming one resonance body. It's interesting, on Mt. Sinai in the Bible, when God speaks to the Israelites, this mass awakening when not just Moses got the Commandments, but people heard the voice of God. Then everybody said, "God spoke to me personally." This is very interesting. It's like it's not there was a universal voice that is the same for everybody because it's universal. There was a universal voice that spoke to the truth of the individual. So, the description of that, that the individual is always a specific expression of the whole means when we are coming together as groups, we are one, as you said, one nervous system, that we feel often so separate and fragmented became the norm, but actually we are always interconnected.

That's amazing because that whole has such a tremendous power. So when one person has a trauma healing process in front of the whole group and the group is dialed in, then we activate that principle more and more and more. So it becomes a self-healing field. I'm sure you have that experience very often. That when there is that group presence and resonance rising, it processes for the individual so much faster. So the person can heal better because of everybody being there, and everybody gets the transmission of the healing, and it becomes a self-healing field. I find this fascinating, and we have seen a lot of it. That's the power we can harvest.

Because people might say, sometimes they would say, "Thomas, there's so much collective trauma." Even while we are speaking here, just 300 miles from where I'm sitting, there is a terrible war going on in Syria. As we speak, people are being traumatized heavily. People will say, "How can we ever deal with that massive amount of trauma all around the world?" I think when we look from the fragmented individual place, then that might be true, that it seems like a huge mountain. But when we come together and we create these more coherent fields, I've seen groups where there

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were hundreds of people in the room and it was so quiet. One person had a process in front of everybody as if everybody was totally there.

The interesting thing is when we are really present, we don't ask how long it's going to take. That's very interesting. When you're really present, you don't ask questions about time because time is here. When we are in the past or entangled in our trauma, so we always, either we want to be faster or we are slower than we actually are. But in the present moment, and I think that presence is—I call this *the resurrection of the collective witness*—that we can pop into from a certain level of group coherence. I saw groups pop into another state of consciousness. Then the most difficult things, like Holocaust survivors and descendants of Nazi Germany were sitting in the same room, you could say almost the person, the perpetrators of the killings of the concentration camps sit close in the room. It's very explosive. But in a way, when there is enough presence, it becomes a naked sharing. That's very powerful.

I think also, as you said before, that this kind of group nervous system, when we learn how to create more of those spaces, that collective trauma mountain becomes relatively smaller, given our capacity of processing is going up. When we are too fragmented ... Then I say, humanity is like a supercomputer that animated many laptops on the screen, and then identified itself with a laptop. It looks like we are all so separate when in fact we are one huge supercomputer that forgot the computing power by being a separate, like a separate device, not like many work stations of one supercomputer. I'm sure that in your groups this kind of phenomenon of strong group presence arises very often. I think we are getting better and better at creating that environment for healing.

Diane: Actually, I find that bringing people's attention to when the resonance starts to get strong, it gets even stronger. You're planting a flag in it and you're supporting it by naming it and acknowledging it, and that's something all therapists can do once they see that shift happening.

Thomas: Exactly.

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Diane: Yeah. There were so many things you said that I remember, I don't know if you've ever come across Ety Hillesum's book, An Interrupted Life.

Thomas: No, I-

Diane: It's about Germany, and she was a Jewish person, but she was also in a secret relationship with a mystical Christian spiritual teacher. So, she had all these levels of secrets because she couldn't out herself as a mystical Christian in the midst of that she was identified as a Jewish person. Anyway, she had a big participation in World War II. She thought she would survive to ... She had this beautiful journal, it took 20 years to have it published. But there's a lot of gems that I think you would enjoy that book.

But anyway, one of the things she said was when she would go into the concentration camps and she would also come back out because she was one of the people that was assigned to help people move to the concentration camps, as weird as that is, because the Germans would have Jewish folks do that. She would see the light coming through the horrors of the Holocaust. She would see light penetrating through all the suffering. She's 23. This blows me away. She also would see the suffering of the German soldiers. She said she knew she couldn't say anything about that because people would think that somehow she was ...

The reason I'm saying that, that's been a hallmark for me. When I'm dealing with dark trauma, it's always like, can eventually the light come through? Can I palpably visibly see it and feel it? I know that's so germane to your work. That's one thing. The other thing is it dissolves victim/perpetrator. I want to talk about both of those things. So, I bring it back to you.

Thomas: Yeah. First of all, also in the more mystical understanding, you're speaking to such important principles right now that I think I am very passionate about bringing science and the mystical science together in order to have that dialogue. Because we could say, like seeing from the mystical lens, there are two qualities of light. One is embodied light, the light that

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becomes awareness that I can feel myself, and then I can feel you through myself, or I can feel the world, or the biosphere or whatever, anything. So, that's embodied light. Then there is potential light is the light that is the innovation capacity of humanity. Otto Scharmer also speaks beautifully about the U-process, and how then how-

Diane: Yes, innovation that ... yes.

Thomas: In presence, many people think innovation and the future is tomorrow. I say no. Innovation and the future always happen only now. In the present moment, it's being born. Out of presence, the future rises, never tomorrow. Tomorrow is usually like a fragment of the past. I believe when the victim/perpetrator dynamic is when what I call the law of life, when the law of life, that life is sacred, has been hurt, it immediately creates two fragments. So there's a victim and there's a perpetrator. But through the trauma, the victim and the perpetrator are inherently interwoven. They're locked. And that's unconscious, and if we are not able to melt the trauma lock through work, the work that we have to do, it's bound to repeat itself.

Like for me, it's like there's this whole dark lake. Within this dark lake, there's a trauma architecture. That architecture is our destiny. Our unconscious trauma is without choice. It runs me. If I'm not aware of the trauma, I'm making decisions unconsciously, so the trauma runs me. I'm not having a free choice in that moment. Only when I develop a certain awareness of it, then I start having a choice. So there are many unconscious processes that run our societies that we are not aware of. We look at them as if they were real choices and real structures of consciousness. I think that's dangerous because we-

Diane: We make stories up of who to blame, and-

Thomas: Exactly.

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Diane: Failure of ... Misattribution. We make up all this attribution that probably in reality, a deeper reality or a lighter reality, that isn't the deeper truth.

Thomas: That's right. How we learn through the work that we're doing, how we learn to bring those fragments closer ... Recently I ran a workshop, and there was a woman, a Jewish Israeli woman, and we were in this process. Then I said to her, "When you feel me," it touched a deep fear in her, and I said, "When you feel me, where am I in relation to you?" Then she said, "You're very far away." Then I said to her, "You see," because she comes from a Holocaust survivor family, "now the 80 years are standing unconsciously between us."

It was not just a personal dissociation, there was a collective dimension. In the moment we recognized that, we could feel her downregulation of her nervous system, like as if something has been acknowledged that is not just the personal struggle. Because she was also in a group where many Germans were part of the group. Then I said, "You see," because she said, "Thank you for taking the time to look at this," because it took some time to process in front of the group. I said, "First of all, we have to thank you. And the time that we take had been decided 80 years ago."

In the moment the catastrophe happened, which split the world into a past and an illusionary future that it takes to reconcile that past into presence. We as people that work a lot with trauma, we are constantly walking with our clients in the, what I call in the underworld of the aftertime. The time that it takes to bring the past back into present to melt the trauma into integration or into new regulation. I think it's very interesting how we think time at the moment on the planet, that the future seems to be tomorrow, when in fact the future is higher consciousness that we give birth to now. That kind of tomorrow is often a representation of our past, the unintegrated past.

I find that beautiful because I think the way we think about time is also a collective trauma symptom, and that we try to often be ahead of our

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development—versus, as the *Tao te Ching* says beautifully, “A journey of thousands of miles starts from beneath your feet.” You know what it means-

Diane: It’s also the collapse of distance.

Thomas: Exactly, exactly, exactly.

Diane: Yeah, time and space, all in that moment.

Thomas: Exactly, beautiful. If trauma healing is turning distance into intimacy, the question is, is our world really as big as it appears to us in our experience? But how much distance is built into the perception of our planet, in billions of people? I think the state of consciousness that that distancing that you speak about, which is a trauma symptom, creates, I wonder how would the world feel like and look like when we become aware that that distance is not normal but it’s a wound, an integrated wound. So, that’s interesting.

That’s for example, if you want to be more constructive with climate change and create a global collaboration, if we have to melt that distance in order to be able to create an environment that is able to do what we need to do to get it globally.

Diane: It seems almost like accessing a different dimension. I think of sometimes maturing through these different elements as perceptual studies. Really taking a look at how we perceive, or being curious about how we perceive, and then sometimes just in that curiosity, we just become perception without any subject/object, just pure awareness. Then time collapses and distance doesn’t seem to be relevant, although we might feel a vastness or an infinity feeling sometimes.

But it’s so interesting to me that we shift our focus, and we have a whole different natural, organic capacities that we never would have imagined we have. But then when we’re there, we know inherently we’ve had them

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all the time, we've just been perceiving from a more contracted or more limited, or like you said, trauma-reactive place.

Thomas: Exactly, exactly. Beautifully said. Right, beautifully said. And that we need to do the healing journey, even if it's sometimes ... because otherwise spirituality becomes an escape ladder, that it becomes my anchor because it's not good here, so I need to go there. How we create the spirituality that is embodied and has transcendence, I think that's really where mysticism and trauma work and trauma science and neuroscience meet. That's very exciting.

Diane: I find a fascination, I guess I've had this since I was born, of trying to understand how human suffering happens, and when it's self-inflicted and when it's happening because it's happening. Necessary suffering versus unnecessary suffering, if there is such a thing. But also what it takes to meet people and yourself, take yourself there, into the dark places that is a part of the human experience, and how to do that in a way that leads to integration and more awareness eventually, and actually a maturation, I think, a strengthening of resilience and a strengthening of awareness.

But so often people have this idea that if you've had trauma in your life, I've heard Bill Maher say it, too, about Joseph Biden on a talk show. He said, "Joseph, Biden's a trauma magnet." I thought, what a terrible thing to say about ... Anyway, I just thought it was definitely out of attunement. But anyway, there can be this societal attitude that somehow people are damaged goods. But if people know how to align with that level of suffering, whether we're individual—and certainly I want to expand this to the collective because you're so masterful with this—they actually can use the same energy of the contraction of the trauma, in a way. If they pace it right and they don't get caught in a trauma reenactment pattern because they get overwhelmed, if they pace it right, that same energy that's contracted, that's really powerful energy, and the same thing with collective trauma, I think, and this is my question really, is it actually fuels the transformation process. So it's learning how do we align with really difficult, painful things that we don't want to look at kinds of things, in

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a way that's, like you said, that the coherence and manageability and resources and things that help us stay present?

But the power in it for growth and maturation and reaching places we never would have even imagined were there is so profound. Not that I'm saying people should go out and look for trauma as fuel, but there's enough going on already here. But there's something about that I find so hopeful and beautiful, and regardless of which dark place somebody brings to me in a session or into a group.

Thomas: That's right. That it's always the fact that we go to search for relief and we go to search for healing, that somebody finds you and then goes through a process with you, and ... So, all that journey is like an investment of energy, and it becomes that posttraumatic learning process. That's amazing, that when more and more people take the trauma and transform it into a learning, that in every trauma there's learning. That's why when we meet challenges or have difficult phases in our life and we turn towards them, then we meet teachers. If we don't want to have problems and don't want to have challenges, so we stay in a very small space in ourselves and in our life.

But I think that turning toward is very powerful. The compensation power sometimes, how we develop other parts of ourselves because we couldn't use one part of ourselves is amazing. I also think that the knowledge of the trauma response inside is an intelligent function in relation to an overwhelming situation. When kids grow up in very incoherent family systems and they need to put defense parents in place that allow them to hold a certain coherence to develop, for many people as grownups, it looks like that this is dysfunctional. I'm not good enough, I cannot compete with others. I don't this, I don't ... But in a way, the intelligence in that defense pattern is my creativity. I created that. I created that because it was better, given the circumstances, than without it.

So, the stigmatization of dysfunctions and turning them into functions is the highway of healing, on the one hand, but it also shows how intelligent we are as human beings, or already as kids, a 2-year-old that is in this kind

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of ... and the parents are all the time quarrelling and it's scary, then there is this function that helped me to isolate myself in order to find a quiet space. Then I say, it's hard for me to connect to people, it's hard to me for me to feel people. But how intelligent it was.

And I think that teaching, because our society is built on the same split outside tools. We have assessment tools. So, what's your strengths, Diane? What are your weaknesses, Diane? We are perpetuating the same internal split, even in very well-meaning assessment tools. I think that we have to see that and change that, and we frame that on a societal level, too. Because the ecosystem mirrors the internal process. So what we carry inside, if millions of people carry such mechanisms inside, the society will also express it.

So that individual healing and the collective reframing of that weakness as our childhood heroes, not weaknesses, is an intelligent function and I can re-own them in order to integrate them. That's not how many people think. I mean, some more trained people, yes. But I think it's not yet a mainstream knowledge that what doesn't work for me means that something works that it doesn't work.

Diane: Yeah, evolutionary intelligence, the intelligence in it. And the choice. And the adaptation, really.

Thomas: Right. Exactly. The intelligence and the adaptation. Because if it's a weakness, I'm looking at how I want to get rid of it. When I see it's an intelligent function that is me, I can connect through my nervous system and re-own that function that looks to me like an it. "I have a contraction in my heart." Or, "My throat is getting tight." I talked to you and suddenly I feel it tight. Yeah, but how did I tighten my throat? The process is often not in my awareness, it's just the effect. How to re-own that process through connecting to the creativity, why it was so important to shut down my voice or hold my fear or whatever. These are very powerful processes.

I think there's a lot to learn also because I have to look at what is expert knowledge that is for people like yourself. You're doing trauma work for

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many, many decades. It's something that you do because you studied this, you put a lot into, you have a lot of experience. But we don't expect everybody in society to have that level of knowledge, the same as not everybody's a high tech expert or an AI expert or something-

Diane: Of course.

Thomas: But society can have first aid. We can have a certain collective competence building that is trauma and collective trauma informed, that many people can learn, the children can learn, that we grow up in certain capacities of co-regulation, of listening to each other, of relating, of resource-building stuff that helps us in our society to become more rigorous, I think that should go out in a much broader level as a collective competence building.

Diane: That would be beautiful. In our trainings, we call it secure attachment skills because we look at things through, one of the lenses is secure attachment. But just how to practicalize that knowledge, how to clinicalize it in sessions, but also how to practicalize it for public education. There's so many ways that this information could be disseminated that it would make it more accessible to everybody, which it really needs to be.

Thomas: Right. I totally agree, yeah. Then the people that really need, that have complex trauma, they need to go to the specialist. But there is certain ... the community can also support certain processes and take off the pressure of the people that don't need a specialist, but they need something else. They need more community, they need more-

Diane: More connection.

Thomas: ... social environments, connection. That would help them to take off the pressure of the skilled therapists. They can deal with the complex trauma, but they are often overloaded because many people need that. So it would balance also something in the flow of how the society distributes resources.

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Diane: That's really true. I think core to what you're saying is shifting it from judgment to compassionate awareness, which is going to soften and help us deconstruct and allow us to have curiosity instead of shut down and judgment, and reenactment.

Thomas: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah, yeah. Beautiful, yeah.

Diane: You talked about this a little bit, but this is something I'm currently teaching a course on, intergenerational trauma. We're talking a lot about how healing in the present also heals the past and changes the future. What we do in the present can actually shift the past, even though the way we normally think about time is already over, but it's not really. It's a living past, in a way. Trying to articulate this is a little tricky, but you talk about retrocausality. I thought that was a beautiful way to say that. I just wondered if you might want to mention something about that.

Thomas: Yeah, yeah. I spoke recently in a group also about this, that we are the conduits of grace. Which means, did our ancestors, in the moments when it was difficult, when they were hopeful or praying to something higher, what happened there? Did they feel the presence of the trauma work that you are doing in your groups, that is bringing a reverse ... the trauma work is affecting life in the past?

That's very interesting because we usually think causality as it's going, it's a progressive process that goes forward in time, in a line. But what if our future is affecting us now that we can have that conversation right now? How we transmit that kind of grace, that the healing in your group of a person ripples back in time and has an effect on the ancestor that experienced something, anything, the Second World War, or the sexual trauma of a woman that has been abused after the war, that the woman here today in the group experiences some relationship issues, and how they're interconnected.

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I think that's one thing, how we affect the past and how grace is being channeled through our actions. That responsibility means that I'm responding and able to respond to my past, and I'm able to respond to my future and to you right now here. So, it's like a cross. In all directions, there is a responsiveness. That responsiveness, I believe, when do we do in the groups ancestral trauma healing, so I invite often the person that I work with in the group and the group—of course, there are levels of skill, but it's also a training—so that we can adjust our nervous system.

If we do it, and let's say somebody has been traumatized at age 5. So that the origin of the nervous system of the trauma energy is on the level of 5, age 5. So I can track that traumatization through my own nervous system. At the same time we can do ancestrally. So, we can tune in with the family system of the parent or the grandparents or their great grandparents and create an awareness from today, our grownup perspective today, if the holding embraces a whole intergenerational tree with literal sensing. Because otherwise the ancestors are an idea. They become alive through the sensing.

There's a beautiful metaphor in the Jewish mysticism that says, "And in the time of the great revelation, the sons will turn to their fathers and the fathers will turn to their sons." What it means also is that when the ancestors, and it's also true for mothers and daughters, like parents to their former generation and vice versa, it's like the presence is being is, equals clarity. So, when one generation can literally see the former or the next generation, light is being transmitted. When many generations transmit light, the light in our body is open, the channels in our body are open because our ancestors are structures of consciousness that are sitting in us.

We are using those structures of consciousness. Because I didn't develop cells sticking together and organs being built, and anger. I didn't invent all of this. I'm sitting in a body that is millions of years old. The structures of consciousness are having these conversations means that our ancestors are having these conversations, also, through us. And the flow of information inside creates structures, and ... But when there's trauma, the parents can not look at their children fully. They can look at them, but not

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see. So when we see the past being the cloud, it creates separation. So the ancestors are distant and in the past.

When we can develop a sensing, then we can bridge, create a data cable that can bring the trauma into now. I think that's a very important process. That it's not just a mental idea of ancestors, but it's a real felt sense that creates the healing. So, that's how we work with that-

Diane: It's fantastic. I love it. I've had clients where they actually access, I mean, we do a process, but they access the injury that was unmetabolized by the ancestor and they actually process it through their own body. Then they just feel this freedom and energy and flow between their ancestors and themselves restored. I had a woman I worked with in Italy and she was having a really difficult time in the actual training, but she started to panic because she couldn't breathe. She started making these motions almost like she was clawing the air.

I said to her, "Did you have anybody in World War II? Did you have any ancestors that were involved in the Holocaust?" Because it just felt like that to me. She goes, "Yes, I had lost this person." I said, "I think you're embodying their experience right now." As soon as we said that, she could still feel it, but she could hold it and move through it. It just released all this tremendous amount of aliveness between her history and herself. But I think this body we have is so magical that we can sense these things and make these connections. It's just the body wisdom. What we are inherently connected to is so much more than many of us realize.

Thomas: Yeah, that's very true. I really think that this relearning, of course we are the age that's in our passport, but the body is a wise, much older biocomputer. I think it's very important to honor how many lifetimes are stored in the body, and that we can think and talk about the way we talk about trauma now. How much needed to happen for us to have this conversation? I think it's tremendously beautiful. What has been passed on to us and how precious that is, and how precious life is. It's stored as a concentrated liquid. And sometimes, because in the modern time we see

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ourselves often as these modern separate people. We have lost any kind of context. Then to reactivate the bigger context I think is very important, without losing the functions of modernity. You know, there are great functions in science so on, of course. But we lost a bit the connection.

I think also in the US, also, because sometimes we are talking about collective trauma and we talk about slavery and racism, which of course ... Then we talk about the Native American genocide, and maybe the Civil War. But often we don't talk about the collective trauma of immigration. What it means that many generations came into a new world were running away often from a bad world that we left behind to come here-

Diane: Prosecution.

Thomas: Yeah, right. Then I often say, when we go away from trauma, we can be sure that we took it with us in the ...

Diane: In the suitcase.

Thomas: In the suitcase, right. I think that even slavery, racism, and the Native American genocide are inherently interwoven with the trauma that it created to immigrate. It sounds like you come from one high-tech company as the CEO, you take a plane and you come to your five-star new house and become the CEO of a new high-tech company. That's maybe not so traumatizing. But that was not the story of most of the people that immigrated to the US. So, I think that level of trauma sits deeply in the rootlessness of many families that even don't remember anymore the lineage, or need to really go to research in order to find out again.

I think there is something about, not only the US society, also in Israel very strongly and in other places, but I think it needs to be worked on. Otherwise there's a lack of connection to the soil, to the land, to the honoring of the land and of nature. Then we create consumption societies that are simply very exaggerated and not anymore in tune with

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the environment that we are living in. Working in the US, that always fascinated me. We did some groups to look at the ancestral and the immigration trauma. It's fascinating, so much there to be looked at. I think it is a cultural creative force. But what we are not aware in our roots, we will see in our society.

Diane: I think it's so powerful to see how much we address or notice symptoms, but you're giving people such a wonderful understanding of how this might be sprouting out of so much more. I mean, if we could do a CTIP right now with the group, I wish we could, on the polarization in the United States that's been so painful for people, not being able to really hear each other or listen to each other, or understand each other. That just keeps replicating. That if there was some way, I know you would work your magic to have this happen in terms of a group coherence.

The question that's buried in this comment is, could you say a little bit about what you've seen as outcome when you've done a deep process, whatever the topic, whether it's the Holocaust or whether it's slavery or whether it's Syria, whatever it might be, how the group has experienced the ripple effect throughout the group, but then also how it might expand beyond the people involved, specifically? Because there's interconnectedness, so just ...

Thomas: Right. Yeah, no. That's very interesting. First of all, what I've seen is that the group goes through this, there's a big eruption, usually, where a lot of material comes up, literally people seeing horrible images in their minds, or having strong emotions or feeling numb, typical trauma symptoms. It happens sometimes at once, 40 people have the same at the same time. Then we go through it, and then we go through ... We always keep the group coherence and sometimes we slow down the process to build up the group coherence so that we always have a good container for the process. That's very important, otherwise it gets stuck.

Then when we built this, and we can manage to create always the right pace for the process, then we often allow people then to share. It's very

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interesting. Some people, they speak their own personal experience. Some people, they say something that sounds like a personal experience that is actually like the voice of the collective. It's a more archetypal energy that speaks to them, and they are often not aware of it. Then, when that happens and I recognize it, then I pause.

It's like when you read a passage of a text again, and I just repeat one sentence or two sentences a person said, and you can literally see or feel in the room how that sentence, that is a psychoactive remedy ripples out in the whole hundreds of people. It does something. It's like somebody gave voice to something that's very important. You see how it touches many people in the room because it's so collective. It's not that my family went through this and this, they're also saying, "My family went through this and this," but where the sentence comes from is from a much deeper well in the collective. It brings up another water. So we go through that. Then we go through small digestion processes, and then often stronger coherence building functions to digest this as a group.

What I see often is that after the group, when we are done with it, when it feels like, okay, now the process finished, you always get the feeling, you know the feeling when it rained and then slowly the sun shines through the cloud? It has the same feeling in the group. It's like we feel that we've washed, like something has been washed, and slowly the light opens up in what seemed so dark for one, two, three days. There's a new light coming in. And you can also feel it in people's bodies, that somehow there's more energy flow.

I had also a conversation with Otto Scharmer once, how we measure the impact of such an intervention in the social body, that is not so easy because it's so complex. Even we did it with 1,000 people in a university in Berlin, so how can you say what's the effect on Berlin? Or on the past? So, there's what I know, and then there is what I feel happens, but I cannot scientifically prove it. What I've seen is that people that were in one CTIP and they came again to another one with a similar topic, you could feel that they have been much less affected by it, and they were much more able to hold a space for the other people going through a deep process.

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So you could see a process outcome in the individual that experienced this already once.

And I also have the feeling, it's like you take a bucket or a certain amount of collective unconscious material, digest it, and then more light can come in. And that it loosens up. We would need to do this more often in the same place, let's say you do a series of those, and then you maybe find some measurements, like how to measure some qualities in the society that you could see, like subtle change processes. I don't have some data about this, but I think that there is a loosening up of that collective trauma stagnation through large groups of people, more energy gets moved, exponentially more than when you do it with 30 people, for example.

Diane: Yes, yes.

Thomas: We see the learning that people take away from it. Also, the experience that that collective trauma sits, like the Second World War and Holocaust trauma, that the heaviness and the pain sits in every nervous system that sits at the desk, at the office, at work, in the hospital, that is a teacher in the school. That we carry that stuff all the time, 24/7. In fact, that it comes up in the CTIP is only that we direct our attention collectively towards a place where that's happening. But its happening there all the time. So, the bodies are in a tension all the time. Our emotional systems are dissociated there all the time. It's not just when we see it in the process, that's just where we see it.

Then I thought, wow, this is amazing because, like many chronic health issues or many very serious health issues that we don't know how to treat at the moment, like mental illnesses and physical illnesses, if that's what our bodies need to compensate on all the time, you know how much effort there is in our nervous systems and bodies to propel into an unconscious Holocaust-

Diane: Yes, yes.

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Thomas: ... unconscious slavery and racism, or unconscious random genocide-

Diane: I just have to say this, I read in Gita Baack's book on, I can't remember the title, but it's on intergenerational trauma with a heavy focus on the Holocaust. She said that the actual definition of the Holocaust was, which is what the intention was in the whole actual Holocaust, but she said it's that's the wrong word to use for it, we should be using a different word because that word technically means something sacred burnt offering to God, which is a terrible way to think about what happened in the genocide.

But put that aside for a minute with what you're saying, actually trauma is, in a way, a sacred process because it brings us even more—can eventually, as we work through it, and if we have the support to do the healing that's necessary—it opens us to a bigger sense of ourselves and each other, and we are different in the world. So, you're creating people that have gone through these processes, that are able to hold that kind of presence in the world. It affects, the ripple effect from just their presence, whether they ever say anything or not is a big deal.

Thomas: That's right. That's beautiful. Also, that we see: there is trauma, then there's trauma healing, and at the bottom of trauma healing, I believe, there is the ethical restoration.

Diane: Yes.

Thomas: It's like something changes in the way I act and I move as a human being. There's an ethical upgrade. I think once that happens, something happens in the tissue of our bodies that can turn on the light again. So that the PTSD and the trauma integration goes to allow a frozen ethical issue to become ... like to open up and to change our ethical way of living. I think that the upgrade of human ethics is an inherent element of trauma healing. That we become better people. As you said, and we are more connected. And we make different choices.

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Diane: The virtues don't become cognitive. It's not like the rule book out of Christianity or any other religion. It's you just are that virtue. You've embodied that Holy law. It doesn't make sense to you to steal or to lie or to hurt someone else. It just isn't in your consciousness. This isn't who you are anymore. I think that the dialogue around ethical upgrade, which I love that term, it's the first time I've used it, but just to return to virtue, which is not a rule book, it's a consciousness. I think that's a beautiful outcome. I just want to underscore that because it's so important.

Thomas: That's perfect. Yeah, and it's also ... Sometimes I say that our nervous system is a lawyer. You talked about the sacred law or the law of life, that the nervous system knows the law of life. Whenever there is trauma or transgression, a part of our nervous system shuts down. We cannot lie to somebody and stay completely open and connected. I can only lie to you when I contract a bit, or I'm numb already and then I don't feel that I contract, but there is a movement that allows the lying, is stepping out of the light. Or stronger transgressions.

The nervous system and the divine law that is here for hundreds of thousands of years of transmitting light from one generation to the next, our nervous system knows every transgression. It needs to dim down a part in order to step out, to be able to do that transgression, that is mostly already based on trauma to start with. Because we don't feel each other, so we do things to each other that we don't heal. But I love this, that whenever we recognize the law again, the nervous system turns on the light. We become more aware of ourselves, of life, of nature, of the biosphere, of ethnicities, and the universe basically. That's fascinating. I think-

Diane: Your eyes are open and they can't close again. I mean, once you know it, you know it. I mean, you might get distracted or contracted by something else, but some part of you is fundamentally, essentially spiritually shifted.

Thomas: That's right.

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Diane: I think that's one of the things I love about doing trauma work. Because a lot of people say, "Why do you do trauma work? It's got to be so dark and heavy, and ... I'm like, "Well, yeah, it starts there, but it goes into these amazing places that's so sacred to me."

Thomas: That's right. Absolutely, I am completely with you. Once I said to William Yuri, we co-taught some courses, and I said to him, "William, why aren't you doing something fun? Why always with people that are in wars and conflicts, and this country against this country?" I asked as a question. Then I said, "Because for you being in those moments is where your light is the strongest, where you feel your mission the strongest, so it doesn't exhaust you." It's also what you've said, it doesn't exhaust you to do trauma work because it's part of your mission. That's where your light is activated.

The *Tao te Ching* has a very powerful, given the ethical upgrade we just said before, it says, "When people follow the Tao, everything will fall into place. If we forget the Tao, we turn to goodness. If we forget goodness, we turn to morality. If we forget morality, we turn to power, or the abuse of power. If we forget power, we end up in anarchy and chaos." That's amazing. Then the Tao says also there are the four great powers, man is great, the earth is great, the universe is great, and the Tao is great. Man follows earth. And what we see at the moment on the planet is man tries to make earth follow man.

Diane: Exploits, yeah.

Thomas: Yeah. But man follows earth, and earth follows the universe, and the universe follows the Tao, and the Tao follows only itself. Which means there is a line, there is this law that we talked about, the law of life. And if every part of life is in alignment with that law, we have flourishing. But if we transgress that law, then we don't have flourishing. So we cut the flow of energy or we cut the flow of life. I think that's what we are working with every day when we heal trauma and we restore that natural order.

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- Diane: I can't think of anything more worthwhile to dedicate my life to. I think a lot of people listening are also inspired and are understanding what you're saying. I wonder, are you able to do this CTIP, the collective processes online, or are you ... I know, with COVID travel is out for now, but do you think you'll be coming to the United States once that resolves? Or what are your plans for the future, where people could jump into a more in-person or maybe online experience with you? I think a lot of people are very interested in that.
- Thomas: Yeah, we are doing all of it. Yes. First of all, I'm planning to come back to the U.S. Because of our students are in the U.S.
- Diane: Yay.
- Thomas: We are now working on the collective trauma integration school. So, we are starting our training programs that are three or five years that are for collective trauma, the CTIP facilitators. It's a three-year program, plus some supervision phase. So, we are going to start the first training like that this year in November, most probably.
- Then we are, for example, now running an online course with 1,500 people where we do collective processes. It's online, and it's amazing. Sometimes I even have the feeling that when we are online, because you can see everybody—when you sit with hundreds of people in a room, you don't see the person that speaks on the other end of the room clearly, you need a camera and you need the screen—but on the screen here, we are so close. Like we are now.
- Diane: I know. You feel like you're in the same room with me, which is so great.
- Thomas: Exactly, exactly. And we feel each other. Once you are dialed in and you can feel this, so there's intimacy anyway. So, we are doing this online also, and it's fascinating. So, we will start. Now, I needed the time to finish the

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book, and now it's out. I want to start again with this kind of interventions, that we do large group processes for currently, for example, racism or for the Native American genocide, or the Holocaust, or ... We're also starting a project so that we can address various trauma fields and learn from them.

We also, in our nonprofit project, the Pocket Project, we have at the moment, 23 international labs that work on colonialism, Europe, Africa, Latin America, in the US, here in the Middle East, and Europe, and Asia. So there are 23, or gender violence, and different ... So, it's very interesting. We developed a meta-learning platform where we harvest the learning, and then we build more and more of these international labs. If people are really interested, there is a whole landscape of very interesting activities and groups and processes that we are running, yeah.

Diane: Well, it's a total joy for me to open up these possibilities for everyone listening. I know they'll respond in what fits for them uniquely. I mean, having been doing trauma work for so long, and I see the power in just even the ways I've been doing it, it's easy for me to see how rolling this out in the way that you're doing it, it's, first of all, necessary, absolutely necessary. It works, I know it works. I've had enough touching in my own experiences that I know it's very powerful. I'm just so excited to support in any way I can the work you're doing because I just feel like it's so hopeful, and so real, and so powerful. Then brilliant. I mean, there's so many adjectives I could throw out right now, but I'm so glad that we can share your brilliance with the group. They know about the book now, which I highly recommend. It's so full of things that we didn't even have a chance to touch on today in this short time we've had together. I just want to thank you so much for the direction your life has taken you, and the mission that you've taken up.

Thomas: Thank you, Diane. It's really lovely. I'm so happy to keep on collaborating and see what we can do together. I really enjoyed the conversation. I love the sparkling spirit that you radiate when you speak about your work, and that you transmit to me. So there's a lovely quality that you bring into the world, very beautiful and bright. So thank you for that-

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Diane: Thank you. Yeah. I feel such a resonance with, and I'd love to learn from you. So, I'm excited to participate in some way to expand that. So I'm sure we'll come up with something.

Thomas: Definitely we'll come up with something. Yeah.

Diane: Yeah. Well, thank you, everybody. I really appreciate you taking this very valuable time to connect to Thomas' work and his presence, and his brilliance in this area. I think it is really something that gives us hope because many of us have been confused about how to meet the strong energies that are coming up. I know around the world, because we have an international audience, but also in particular with the United States, we have a lot of disruption, trauma eruptions, as Thomas calls them, with racism and Me Too movements, I think unresolved Civil War, Vietnam War, what's happening now, the political polarization, there is so much going on that many of us have felt like, well, what to do, or how do we help? I think this is just a really wonderful opening for deep wisdom. So, check it out. Thanks again so much for taking the time to join us. Thank you, Thomas, so much for being you.

Thomas: Thank you, Diane. It was a pleasure, a real pleasure.

Diane: Okay. Bye for now, everyone. See you soon.