



## 1.6 Opening to my Authentic Self

Reflecting on the guiding questions we used in our little Flemish circle (How do we ... out of deep respect and love? How can I respond out of love even if I don't like what you said? How to show respect to others even when I am in a hurry?) I came to wonder: Why don't we ask these questions every day and in every situation, instead of only when we are in a circle or in a workshop? Even more importantly: Why don't we live up to the answers that our hearts whisper silently all the time? Why is it more difficult to act on these answers about how to be present – especially when we work and live together – than to read about it or talk about it to our friends? There is a big difference. Everybody feels it. It is because we are *involved*, with our whole being. We cannot hide. We cannot be our so-called normal, conditioned self any longer. We have to change. The new paradigm in the world, the change in our organisations, more respect embodied in our relationships – all these demand the transformation of myself, of our selves. Nothing less will do.

This chapter describes how the four movements of *observing, accepting, honoring and living what is* apply to my relationship with myself. The next chapters will expand through the process of outer alignment, where we find a growing balance with the people and context around us. This process of alignment within – *I and myself* – will uncover the realms of subtle sensing and inner knowing inside your self. They have always been there, but haven't been in the spotlight. This subtle art of inner alignment gradually gives access to more authenticity, until you are able to shift from your default, conditioned and habitual way of being towards acting in authenticity and flexibility, wherever you are. Authenticity here implies the mind and body integrated, being and knowing in synergy in all kinds of ways. Becoming your own instrument, fine-tuning it and learning to hold your own melody.

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You might wonder why we go to all the effort of uncovering this inner realm. In today's world, strong energetic, human containers (groups, teams, families, organisations) are needed to hold complexity, chaos and turmoil, to provide a sheltered space where individual members can share their stories and be vulnerable. For this to be possible, we need individuals who are strong containers in and by themselves. That means people who take full responsibility – in the sense of 'response-ability' – for their emotions, their body's energy fields, their thoughts, the power of their own will; people who can contain themselves, who can witness all this at once, even when the emotional and energetic charge is very high. This is why this science and practice of inner alignment, of becoming present, is so crucial in these times. Through this practice we discover and hold our unique melody and keep singing harmoniously in the choir, even when a lot is happening all around.

Later we will see how individual, personal authenticity can evolve further, towards living your soul's calling. It has become clear to me that the



increasing complexity of life will not lead to some kind of oneness, some level or form that fits all. Rather, it invites us to express more of our unique ways of being, to become 'an exemplar' as Bonnie (Bonnitta Roy) would say. As we each learn to do this, grounded in our own voice, then the practice of choral improvisation becomes possible – learning to sense and ride the shifting patterns emerging from the

middle.

Referring to his focusing process from the felt-sense, Gene Gendlin says: "This authenticity is defined not by its outcomes, but by its kind of process." This applies here in the same way. The process of inner alignment, applied to my personal self, has no final destination. It is not about finding my authentic self at some point in time and then I am done, the journey is over. No, we will see that the unraveling of our mental conditioning goes on and on; the unfolding of our unique ways of expressing our self never ends. We will approach levels of ever more refined energy, and we will become sensitive to the life force coursing through us.

On the surface, it looks as if we know a lot about 'I', the 'me' that I present in the world every day. Never before in history have we heard this little

word 'I' with such frequency. But who is this 'I', really? How much am I aware of what is really going on inside me? Is my attention as grounded in my subtle senses, my physical sensations and my feelings, as it is in my thoughts, ideas and beliefs? How often do I realise only after the fact what it was that I was actually feeling or sensing? These questions are linked with what Otto Scharmer calls the 'blind spot of leadership'. Most disciplines of therapy, personal development, coaching and mentoring beckon us inwards with our attention, to witness the deeper layers of this entity we call 'I'. And it is always a dis-cover-y. What we uncover in this process is the fullness of who we really are. We embrace and integrate the more subtle meanings that are hidden within us, and step by step we come to inhabit our unique self, shedding the conditioning that has been there since childhood or that we borrowed from society. What remains is a self that is transparent, vulnerable, radiant and full of energy: our authentic self.

As Yasuhiko Kimura stated online: "Authenticity is etymologically and existentially linked to authorship and authority. To be authentic entails being the author of your own life based on your own inner authority, free and independent of external authority in the matter of thinking, knowing, and acting. Self-integrity and self-honesty are built into authenticity." I couldn't put it any better.

What follows is the description of the four movements – observing, accepting, honoring and living what is – that we described in general in chapter 1.4, now applied to the process of becoming more present with and aligned within myself. In this process of inner alignment of I and Myself, we focus our attention on our inner being, our inner landscape and we prepare ourselves to open up to embrace and integrate all that we discover inside.

## **1. Observing what is – in myself: opening to the full experience of my inner being**

Being open to the full experience of myself and *observing and acknowledging what is*, must include the physical level of my being; because that is – as a matter of fact – the ground of my self. I focus my attention on my internal experience: the physical sensations in different parts of my body, the feelings and emotions that arise with differing degrees of intensity, and the subtle sensations (that we described before) that are also there. Most Westerners are not used to giving attention to their bodies and the wealth of information that the body provides. I have had many clients over the years that who would answer "nothing", when asked what was going on inside, in their bodies. To acknowledge the body is to notice its signals, and to take this bodily information seriously: using the

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information of derived from seeing, feeling, hearing and intuiting as equally valid and complementary to the information provided by our thinking.

The physical body is, on the one hand, a storehouse of old memories and, on the other hand, a very good receptor of subtle signals from the fields around us - and of course much more. Therefore, we must first become good inner listeners, inner observers, to be able to discern what is old and comes from memory, and what is truly in relation with the here and now. The importance of body awareness for the grounding of wisdom cannot be overstated; it is in and through the body that we can check our level of being present.

The aim for of the first part of this book is to arrive at collective wisdom. As in any team sport, the training and awareness of the body is not the ultimate purpose, but is in service of the team playing as a whole. In the end, it is in my body, as a container, that I can hold the energies of feeling, thinking, chaos, wisdom and so on. Only in this way can I really contribute to the collective wisdom of a group. If you want to expand your awareness in this field, it is both good and necessary to have a body-awareness training or practice - such as aikido or other martial arts, tai chi, yoga, dancing, any kind of meditation, walking or other practices - that uses the body as the point of entry.

## **2. Accepting what is – in myself: expanding my self-image and integrating my subtle inner experience**

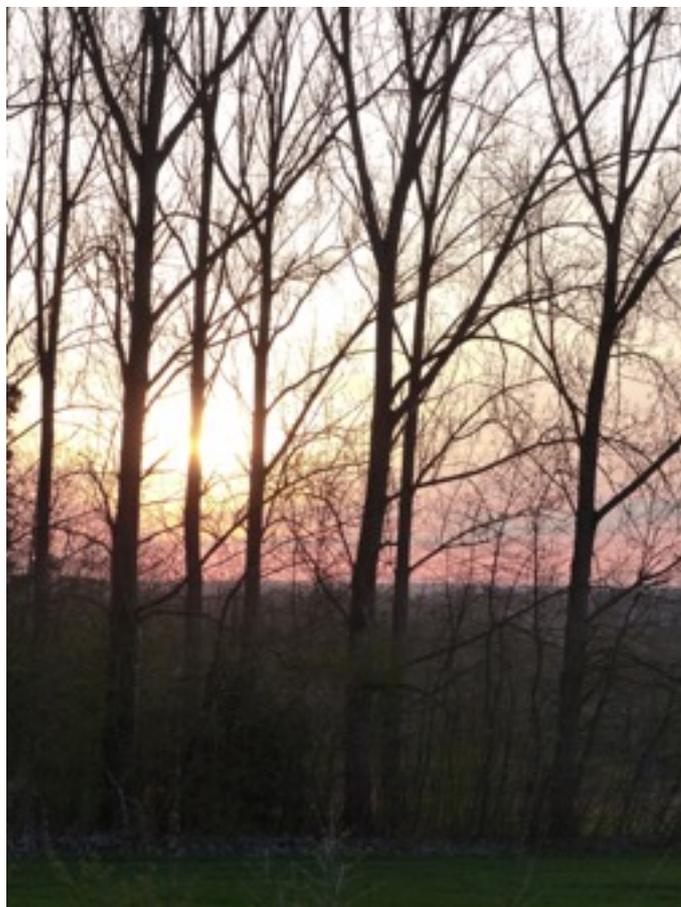
We can summarise the movement of *accepting what is on the personal level* as the witnessing and the suspending of our habitual 'this is me' and accepting that there is more to it. Most of our actions – and thinking - are literally re-actions: repeating the same thoughts and actions. doing or thinking the same again. As Otto Scharmer calls it 'downloading'. Downloading happens not only in thinking, but equally in feeling, speaking and actions. It applies, too, to our self-image. This doesn't change easily. We hold onto a consistent self-image; we believe that we stay the same and we use our this self-identity as something to rely on. The first step is to recognise that this is what we are doing: downloading, repeating old patterns. Only then we can be open up to something new.

*Accepting what is in myself* means focusing our attention on widening our view on and of our selves, realising that we are more than the habitual form that we identify with. If I sit with my self for a while, and expand my observations inwards, I will notice that there are also other, more subtle signs in myself that don't really fit in with my habitual way of looking at myself. Maybe I got a hunch that something was going on with my friend, but I greeted her in my habitual usual way, without really paying attention.

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Maybe I was more deeply hurt than I had first realised and shared with my partner. Maybe I intuited that there was something strange going on in that organisation, which could have informed me better from the outset, if only I had paid attention. Maybe a clear vision came to me in a team meeting, but I didn't dare to voice it.



*Accepting what is in myself* means taking all these subtle signals as just as valid - at least worthwhile checking out and taking into account – as well as my normal, default ways of seeing my self. We then come to a point where we widen our idea about ourselves, first to admit, and later to integrate, our unique way of sensing the subtle into the definition of who and how we are. We open our hearts for more of ourselves and in the same movement we have more acceptance of the unique contribution of every human being, and even beyond.

### **3. Honouring what is – in myself: Deepening my self -image and connecting with my inner gifts**

*Honouring what is in myself* means not just accepting, - (“OK, it’s true that I noticed that.”), - but also owning these so-called deeper sensing parts of

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myself, these deeper layers that I have mostly been hiding away. It's about achieving full congruence – or at least intending to – between what I share with others, my self image and my deepest experiences.

In our Western culture, our subtle sensing has for the most part been in the shadow; it has not been allowed to be (fully) present. For this reason it still holds a certain gem-like quality: because it has had to hide in the dark and has not been permitted to be visible it is loaded with a heavy emotional charge, which conceals the beauty of its essence. We will be amazed! By opening up to this subtle shadow we find a precious gift: our unique individual way of sensing, our very own contribution to understanding more of what is going on, our unique unique gift to collaboration and co-creation.

As mentioned before, we all have a preference – or a natural priority – as to which faculty our subtle sensing manifests through most. For myself, I am very kinaesthetic, and so I sense lots of things right in my body, as an ache, as a certain pressure, as a sense of constraint in certain areas of my face, as a quality of deep opening in my lower belly. I'm very physical, very much here-and-now, and I want to walk the talk right away. And sometimes I just *know*, with a sense of total alignment between my head, my body and my subtle senses. This knowing has a certain quality of 'this is it', without any trace of a doubt. But I hardly ever 'see' things, or 'hear' information. I feel it, or I know it. For others it is different. The point, in *honouring what is*, is to be grateful for your own way of accessing subtle information and not to try to do like others, or to compare your unique way with theirs. I have a friend who took some years to understand and accept that her 'instant-knowing-just-like-that' was no less valuable than the clear and detailed images that could be perceived and described by others.

#### **4. Living what is - in myself: Sharing and expressing my unique gifts**

After honouring my deeper self the only possible next step is *living and expressing myself, as I am, subtle sensing included*. I share my thoughts and emotions, I share the subtle clues I perceive, I share my highest wildest dreams and my deepest aspirations. Alongside sharing through language, I also show my unique form of creativity: my dance, my models, my poetry, my deep insights, my inner knowing, my sensing, my theory, my cooking, my disturbance, my flower arrangement, ... I am no longer stuck in downloading, I am free from of any compulsion to conform to a certain type of identity. I am aware of my gifts to the world, I can now show up as an authentic person.



### Ode to a Cloud

Take time to watch a cloud  
 Changing shape before your eyes,  
 Holding its shape so lightly,  
 Willing to die for love of the whole

Who is this 'I' who holds its shape so tightly,  
 Clinging to form as though it's all I know.  
 Would we were like clouds  
 Willing to be known only for a moment  
 As 'That'

– by Wendy, participant in WmtE2, Nov.2007

## The experience of inner alignment

**Quotes:** (from conference call, as preparation for the first WMtE gathering, 6 May 2009)

Judy: “When I am connected to my body then there is also a heart connection; and the mental is still there. Then I am being as a human in a more integrated place; a fine-tuned sensibility, a way to sense into, and being fully present. When I feel really aligned, all of that is there, including what I sense in my body; and often there is a vibration, which is very physical. Vibration, a kind of pulsing, that is the signal to me that I am there.”

Eugenie: “Sitting in silence. I feel exactly what you feel. Plus I feel a lot of heart energy. Energy flowing through my body. Also feet and hands, I feel the ground that I sit on. I also feel the energy in my body. I am very open in my heart, very clear in my mind, through all situations. Feeling alive, sexy without seducing, very aware of the power of giving birth, giving life, creating life through my body.”

The ultimate purpose of this chapter *I and Myself* is to reveal what else is possible if we open ourselves more deeply and widely – for ourselves. It is a journey of many thresholds and little and big jumps into territory that sometimes seems frightening, because we go beyond our Western belief of what is right or true or valuable. We integrate more of our subtle and animal nature by acknowledging that we do sense a lot that in daily life is neither shared nor talked about. Still it is there, we all have the capacity to do it; we are hard-wired for this, and yet the capacity has not been used, let alone been trained and practiced. The outcome is that we dis-cover

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our true self, digging it free from under the conditioning. The reward is being and feeling more alive and present throughout our whole life.

The next chapter moves from becoming present to *I and myself*, to becoming present to *I and relationships*. We are widening our the scope of the field in which we can learn to grow our awareness and our presence. We will again use the same four sub-movements (*observing what is, accepting what is, honoring what is and living what is*) and gradually build a whole map (part 4.7) that will in the end reveal what it all this can lead to: building capacity for collective wisdom. Not just collective intelligence, but authentic collective wisdom; more on the difference between these concepts later. (part 4.2)

