

Thomas Hübl's The Pocket Project: Facilitating the Integration of Collective Trauma

by Julie Jordan Avritt

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation...

~ Exodus 20:5

They transmitted only the wound to their children, to whom the memory had been refused.

~ Nadine Fresco

Imagine for a moment a couple, perhaps one you once knew intimately. They're just sitting down to dinner. After a few bites, the man asks his partner what she thinks of the meal.

"It's good, honey, but this asparagus couldn't possibly have been fresh when you bought it." Since you already know our hypothetical couple, you can likely guess what happens next.

Our chef doesn't hear, "it's good, honey." What he hears is criticism. Soon, the tension in the room grows as dark as the Malbec. An argument erupts. Given its scale, it is clear that something far deeper than the sin of limp asparagus has been running beneath the surface—suppressed, hidden, or denied.

While such energies remain largely buried, they can be all too easily triggered to the surface in times of stress and overwhelm.

Thomas Hübl, a contemporary mystic and spiritual teacher, often facilitates large groups through a process for the collective integration of trauma. Hübl uses an allegorical image, illustrating the collective unconscious as a dark subterranean lake, and believes its contents are essential to both individual and cultural healing. Instances of personal and multi-generational suffering create dislocation, dissociation, and separation from the essential self and from one another. If the memories and emotions we carry around our struggles and traumas—the experiences that created our dislocations—are not healed, Hübl believes they will be passed down to successive generations.

The core of his work is simple though not easy: making the collective unconscious conscious, integrating the many.

Where economists seek to understand repeating cycles of financial and political unrest, Thomas Hübl sees simply "collective chunks of shadow trying to process themselves." Inspired by his discoveries, he founded The Pocket Project, whose subject of care is 'one client,' or humanity as a whole. The mission of the project is "to stop the vicious cycle of recurring collective trauma and

ultimately integrate and reduce its effects in our global culture." No small task, but noble and necessary.

For fifteen years, Hübl has worked internationally, facilitating groups through the process of collective integration of shadow, assisting with the healing of both individual and shared trauma. He has facilitated as many as 1,000 people through the sometimes uncomfortable but always powerful process, and on one occasion, he worked with a large group in Germany while many in Israel were streamed in through a live connection. The work has taught him the significance of healing unconscious material by bringing it into the light of day inside a shared container of trust, presence, and non-judgment. He says he began to see clearly, though rather by accident, how groups—even very large numbers—could begin to release deep cultural pain. This arose out of a process in pattern recognition and Hübl's innate knack for seeing holons or 'wholes within wholes' (i.e., the way group shadow work mirrored perfectly the process of awakening for couples, and how this process mirrored the same for individuals).

The Importance of Group Coherence

When strangers come together in a meeting place, some may arrive wearing social masks, protecting themselves from expectations and judgments, or presenting an image of themselves as how they want to be perceived. Hübl sees these as elegant coping mechanisms created as a defense against further suffering; most are entirely unconscious. But to engage healing at any level, a degree of coherence, intimacy, and transparency is required—the same way an individual and her therapist need trust and connection for healing to occur, or the way a couple requires listening, presence, and attunement in order to engage and grow. Hübl works alongside a team of trained therapists and facilitators, there to support an energetic initiation, so that safety and coherence arise at the beginning of the group session. They also support individuals more privately, should anyone require assistance with painful emotions.

Hübl explains that groups—however large—tend to display a consistent energetic pattern when working to integrate shadows (again, mirroring the same work for couples and individuals). At a certain point in the process, a heavy feeling takes over the room. Many people begin to express resistance. Some may want to get right up and leave. Here, Hübl's advice is always the same: stay with the process; stay present; attend to whatever is arising.

There is a stage at which the group feels collective exhaustion. The entire room begins infectious yawning and a quality of



Thomas Hübl teaching at the Celebrate Life Festival

dullness or boredom may briefly arise for some in attendance. These collective symptoms—indicating suppressed emotions—portend strong waters ahead and are signs that the process is working.

After years facilitating many groups through integrative shadow work, the ‘cultural mystic’ believes these intense emotional responses—so regular he could practically set his watch by them—are in truth the symptoms of suppressed scars, signposts to forgotten traumas and hidden suffering in need of conscious resolution. It’s a beautiful mystery to consider that, even in our deepest pain, we are all so inextricably linked.

“When the field finds enough coherence, enough intimacy, suddenly many people may begin to feel strong emotions,” he says. “They may begin to cry.” More profoundly, “many people at once may see visions of the Holocaust.” These are powerful group phenomenon.

The same experiences have occurred repeatedly across groups, though Hübl does not tell his audience what to expect. He has termed the arrival of such symptoms a ‘collective eruption.’ They seem to arise as a cascade of shared witness, serving to release previously blocked pain. It may take days to process the emotions surfacing after such eruptions, requiring strong collective presencing through the surfaced material.

Hübl emphasizes the importance of conscious structures in the process of healing. By first creating the space of trust, mutual witness, and non-judgment—a ‘conscious container,’ he explains—any dark emotions and previously unresolved pain within the

group are able to emerge safely. A solid structure has been formed, strong enough to hold even powerful energies. If there is too much rigidity, or conversely, too much chaos, the structure will be inadequate and retraumatization may occur.

“If world governments are unable or unwilling to handle five million refugees, fleeing war-torn countries and flowing into Europe and abroad, how will they handle the mass migration of humans from global climate catastrophe?” Hübl presciently asks. Understanding trauma and its relationship to the unconscious is more important now than ever. These concerns can no longer be relegated to the outskirts of psychological science.

Too often the presence of refugees and the unacknowledged traumas they carry trigger deep-seated fear, anger, intolerance, tribal territoriality, and sadly, violence. These stressors create intense social pressures, activating emotional regression on all sides. This is the cue for collective shadows, previously hiding in the dark lake, to rise and begin to dominate. Political backlashes occur. Hate groups emerge. Mob mentality reigns. While all of this may be part of a grand architectural strategy of human evolution—internal pressures pushing us to seek higher ground in every millennia—it is time we collectively activate the greatest technology of all at our disposal: conscious choice. The choice to heal, to integrate, to grow.

When Cultural Shadows are Triggered

Hübl shares a frequent mystical teaching: as a tree grows, it may encounter a line of barbed wire, and so it grows around the wire, incorporating the wire into itself.



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We are like trees.

The painful experiences of our past become frozen¹ in our bodies as stuck energies, trapped within the unconscious. At later junctures, experiences or interactions invariably, if inadvertently, touch or trigger these shadows, then these barbed wires coil into our roots. When these moments occur, we are likely to react out of proportion to the situation—upset, defensive, possibly combative. Perhaps we end up shadowboxing. When our shadows are touched or when our traumas are triggered, we experience sudden distortions in perception.

On the social scale, the exposed ‘barbed wire’ is reactionary ethnocentrism, intense nationalism, isolationism, racial hatred, or xenophobia—an actual fear or hatred of foreigners. Says Hübl, when large groups of foreign migrants or refugees suddenly flood a nation’s borders, otherwise kind citizens suddenly regress en masse. This is how a large subgroup holding shared ancestral trauma (one at a similar stage of conscious development) suddenly begins to express territorial tribal instincts. And these instincts may push them to engage in war with real or imagined foes. They are likely to perceive a stream of foreign refugees—men, women, and children who are desperately fleeing a warzone—as dangerous and criminal and other. At that subterranean, other-dimensional level, tense energetic frictions are exposed.

If we interact with these subgroups from a place of judgment or latent hostility (our own shadows equally triggered), we move increasingly backward, retrogressing what should be humanity’s ceaseless forward trajectory. This increasingly complex time is our cue, Hübl suggests, to both pay closer attention to our quiet inner stillness and to join the collective joy, the drumbeats of depth and span and integration.

The collective trauma we carry and will pass to our children is evident: atrocities of war, ethnic genocide, climate catastrophe, preventable illness caused by systemic poverty—this list is difficult to write or to end. “The energy of these experiences,” Hübl says, “resides between us in an unseen way, affecting our daily lives.” The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study² and other research points to a clear connection between factors of ongoing stress or trauma in childhood and to disease or factors for mental illness in adulthood. Suffering in the life of a single individual can be catastrophic, but Hübl explains how collective traumas, exponentially compounded, “have a far greater impact on health and on social, economic, and political world events.”

“Many of us have been born into a field or a legacy of big trauma, but this is very hard to see,” Hübl says, “because many of the symptoms of trauma appear normal.”

The Second World War, Apartheid, post-slavery economies, a 15-year war in the Middle East, Nigeria, and Boko Haram, child soldiers in South Sudan, and tens of thousands of souls lost in Syrian atrocities³ have all resulted in a stunning refugee crisis. Big trauma impacts individuals, societies, economies, and entire cultural spaces. To become part of a solution to any of these systemic problems, we must face them awakened. And, says Hübl, we must strive to recognize their aftereffects.

“From a scientific and a therapeutic practice point of view, we are beginning to understand how to approach trauma in the individual human being,” he says. “We have begun to identify the after-effects of trauma on the human nervous system and how this relates to our daily interactions with the world. We understand more about how it affects our relational capacities and social intelligence.”

The research on epigenetic, transgenerational implications of trauma⁴ and its aftermath appears to support Hübl's instincts. He acknowledges that new research is pointing to "new ways of working and new forms of understanding deeper world integration methods and possibilities, so that we, as a we-space, can take care of our own life base. And so that together, we may begin to heal the suffering we are born into." This suffering, he says, is here between us, unseen, and unacknowledged.

Cultural Eruptions

As the nations of Europe and beyond continue to face refugee crises, complex problems of planetary climate change, militarized conflict, economic inequality, and other global grand challenges of a post-modern world in flux, Hübl believes the call for conscious integration of collective traumas is most important among them. "Our world is a field of increasing complexity, one which has many scars," says Hübl. "These scars still have effects in us."

It is the aim of The Pocket Project to lend healing in as many places around the world as possible, so the effects of these scars—the effects of imperialism, colonialism, war, slavery, human trafficking, greed, poverty, and man's inhumanity to man—will bear fewer effects on succeeding generations. The 'sins of the fathers' should no longer be inherited by their sons.

With a mind for emerging patterns, systemic structures, and leading-edge mental models, Hübl's primary analysis is essentially this: all cycles of cultural disruption and civil unrest, whether social or economic, emerge in societies as symptoms of suppressed suffering. These unresolved systemic traumas are passed down through generations⁵ and borne en masse by the progeny of the previously traumatized, compounding with each successive cohort. This may sound like terrible news, but there may be an evolutionary point—or at least, a path. To a mystical thinker like Hübl, these interior cultural tensions emerge as the result of the mass accumulation of suppressed cultural shadows, working beneath the surface like tectonic plates. Eventually, the profound pressures they generate create the social eruptions we see, pointing to patterns in need of healing.

If we awaken enough to become alert to underlying personal and social tensions, and are cognizant enough to see personal and social patterns, perhaps we will be the next pioneers at the edge of consciousness. For now, it is the unconscious in need of our attention. After all, with its integration, the domain of shadows may become instead a rich reservoir of inspiration, innovation, and genius. And perhaps when enough of us have processed our shadows, we will finally see that 'thousand years of peace.' There is reason to hope.

International Aims of The Pocket Project

The Pocket Project for Collective and Intergenerational Trauma Integration is a noble and visionary initiative created in we-space,

where conscious collaborators come together with the purpose of healing their unconscious counterparts, our shared 'dark lake.'

The project acts as an open source document, an informational platform, creating 'pockets' of crowd-sourced and volunteer-supported online and real-time spaces, rich with research and support—accessible in places all over the world.

Passionately describing Hübl's strengths, Nicholas Janni, Founder and Director of Core Presence, explains that The Pocket Project "really looks to find a marriage between mystical insights and cutting-edge psychology and psychotherapeutic methodology, as well as scientific, genetic, and brain research." Hübl has described the impulse of the project this way: inducing the collective to heal the collective.

At the arrow tip of the leading edge of the evolutionary impulse of consciousness, Thomas Hübl is simultaneously ahead of his time and so precisely a product of it.

¹ The freeze response—considered to be an evolutionary coping response in mammals—is referred to scientifically as 'tonic immobility' and is used by psychologists to describe an aspect of the human response to emotional stress and trauma.

² Violence and Injury Prevention: Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ). (2017). World Health Organization. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/activities/adverse_childhood_experiences/en

³ According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a non-partisan body, 55,000 people were reportedly killed in Syria in 2015.

⁴ Yahuda, R., et al. (2016). Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects on FKBP5 Methylation. *Biological Psychiatry*, (5), 372–380.

⁵ Transgenerational or *intergenerational trauma* is the "transmission of historical oppression and its negative consequences across generations," (Urban City for Aboriginal Youth, YMCA Calgary, and University of Calgary, 2012).

The Pocket Project is achieving its mission to assist with the collective integration of trauma, offering humanity much-needed healing at a critical time. The Pocket Project builds cultures of prevention; trains and supports groups worldwide; offers tools for developing competencies; and combines the latest in psychological research in order to create a flexible web of care across cultures. pocketproject.org

Thomas Hübl is a contemporary mystic whose work is a marriage of scientific knowledge and Western psychological research with our world's ancient wisdom traditions and revered spiritual practices. In a time of increasing complexity, Hübl sees clearly the exterior and interior dimensions of our familial, social, cultural, political, and spiritual realities. He is a deep systems thinker, a pioneering visionary of consciousness who shares revealed teachings with gentleness and strength. These qualities come together to offer striking clarity and simplicity. thomashuebl.com; celebrate-life.info; innerscience.info

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