SPIRITUALITY

by Arturas Deltuva

We often hear and we even say that spirituality should have its part in training. But what do we mean exactly when we say so ? Arturas Deltuva starts what we hope will be a series of articles on this important subject.

Prayer and/or meditation during a training course?
It can happen, but then it is very specific and not for everybody. We probably mean something else when we talk of spirituality. There's the "wise" face of a trainer who sometimes mentions the meaning of life, talks of the soul or says bullshit but in a way that it sounds like he/she would quote the Bible or the Holy Spirit herself. Maybe this is not real spirituality as well...

But then what is it? The best answer for myself - for now - I found in the book of John O'Donahue "Anam Cara. Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World". He describes spirituality as the attitude to human nature as the nature that goes beyond the level of functionalism and efficiency only and goes to the secret of potential and compassion of the individual person. The Spirit wakes up when the individuality of the person wakes up. Then the blunt energy of functionalism decreases and a new alive energy fertilizes our action(s).

You could say – but this is about personal development. Yes. Maybe. I think it is one, but not the only aspect of spirituality in training. In a way it is the possibility and ability to turn "project management" as a topic into "project management in relation with me", or "human rights" as a topic into "human rights in relation with me". It is when we can learn with our individualities, when we can learn through interest and compassion with each other. Another way to describe this is to see it as transforming the topic into the issue, turning objective to subjective, theoretical to lived concerns. So reflection groups, solo moments and all other situations when participants can face their issues in the topics, can be called spiritual moments or potentially spiritual moments. For example, Open Space Technology - according to this point of view – can be a spiritual method in itself. It is a space for issues in the topic.

## One difficulty for spirituality in training

Yes. I call it difficulty, NOT a challenge. A challenge is what we should or can try to overcome. Difficulty is what we should learn to live with. One of the main difficulties is emptiness. For the participants of a training course, it can be that THERE IS NO ISSUE! And it is not in our hands, it is not in the hands of trainers. We can provide a topic, we can provide a space for discoveries, but the issues are up to our participants. And sometimes it happens that "the issue" for a concrete person doesn't exist or it is so "uncomfortable" that the participant doesn't want to face it. Then we hear: "Hey trainer! You should dance! You should do something! Nothing happens here. It is empty time. I could do nothing at home. Trainer! Do something!" Fear of emptiness – the main obstacle for what is alive, for real issues, real wishes, and real interests. What we as trainers do then when we are afraid of emptiness? I know what I do – I often keep the programme overplanned, put too much into it. What do you do?

There are more difficulties...

One challenge for the spirituality in training

The challenge here lies in developing the awareness or ability and possibility to recognise the issue and to stand for it explicitly. In order to explain what I mean I use the Gestalt Cycle of Experience (Edwin C.Nevis, "Organizational Consulting. A Gestalt Approach", 1998). The theory says that there is a certain process before the explicit action of a person takes place. Everything begins with sensory arousal and the cycle of experience grows as awareness develops of what is going on within oneself or the surrounding environment. Awareness is growing consciousness from what we see, hear, touch, smell or taste. Out of awareness comes excitement or energy to react to what we sense. It leads us to action and contact – the explicit expression of our issues or concerns.
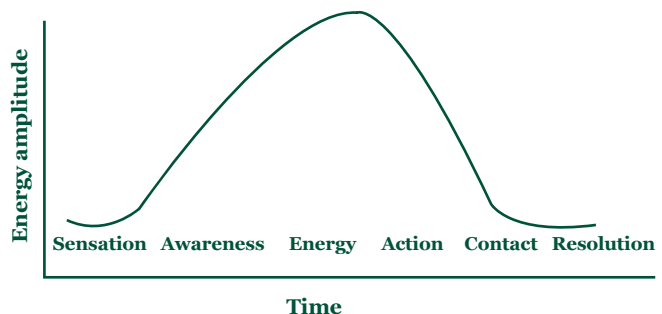
The Cycle of Experience seen as energy arousal and discharge.

Where are challenges here? At each stage, we can get stuck and can stop moving ahead. When we are not able to notice the sensation, it stops; when we do not allow ourselves or others to react emotionally on it – it stops; when we do not take action according to what we feel as the issue – it stops; when we do not get in touch
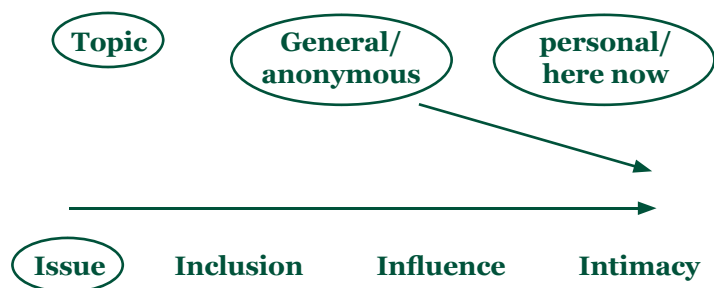
IN TRAINING.
DEMYSTIFIED

with other people about our issue it stops again. That is the challenge: for the person to be able and responsible to BE (to notice, to act and to contact) in the group as he/she is and for the group to be open for others as they are. We notice this especially in international groups, because differences are bigger and we usually feel less safe there. It is a very natural challenge and we all face it constantly.

There are more challenges.

One opportunity.
The group process. It is something that helps us in our process of turning the topic into the issue. Theory (Sources: Corey M.S., Corey G, 1987, Srivastva, Obert & Neilsen, 1977; Hovelynck & Vanden Auweele, 1998) says that at the beginning of our learning process there is a distance between topic and issue, but when the group process goes on (trust, openness, safety in the group is growing, when the relationship "Me-it", turns into the relationship "Me–You"(Buber M, 1998, 1958)), we have a chance for the topic to become the issue or just to let the issue to be opened. So the group process can give us a chance for the Gestalt cycle of experience in each of us. Usually at the beginning the topic and the issue are far away from each other. The topic sounds general and anonymous. The real issue happening inside the people can be – am I in the group or out of the group? Who is the boss here? How close to or far from other people am I?... Maybe only later the group becomes more open to other questions about the topic – how the topic is related to my reality, my role in it and maybe even how it is revealed here in this group – what about my rights here? What about planning and managing time here?...

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Topic        General/        personal/
             anonymous       here now
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Issue        Inclusion       Influence       Intimacy
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Scheme to symbolize relations between topic and issue (adapted from Outward Bound Belgium group dynamic model: based on: Srivastva, Obert & Neilsen, 1977; Hovelynck & Vanden Auweele, 1998 theories)

So I think we are right when we are patient enough to wait for the moment when those two – topic and issue – meet in the group, but also when we are open to notice what is a topic and what is an issue in this group now. And when we are open to this process, we should be able to allow things to happen or even not to happen for some time; to allow both pleasant and unpleasant moments, comfortable and uncomfortable questions to arise and even to allow people to hide behind the topic and to be fully just pragmatic and impersonal, because nobody told them that training should have this dimension of spirituality!

There are more opportunities.

Some tools for spirituality.
First tool. Kill the tool-box trainer.
(I can not help with the definition of this, but for understanding please wait until the "third tool"; if it doesn't help, don't worry; maybe this term is just a joke)
Second tool. The first is enough.
But if you want the third one – learn to be in the process of discoveries with trainees.
In the process to be weak and lost, to feel strong to confront and disagree, in the process to be sure or to feel doubts.

Spiritual part.
I still hear the sceptic screaming:
but where is spirituality here?!!!
The spiritual tradition that I come from,
says – "spirituality is in us". And now I'll shut up. ■

• The Coyote Spirit

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