

# Seven Elements of Self-Healing

## Exercises for a life with more relaxation, empowerment and joy of living

(Version 13)

### Preface to Version 13

In this text I present my understanding of the transformation practice of Robert Gonzales. He is one of the most experienced trainers for Non-Violent Communication (NVC of Marshall Rosenberg). The focus of his transformation practice is the compassionate and “non-inforced” transformation of all unpleasant feelings (anger, stress, anxiety, worries, tension, frustration, guilt, resignation, ...) through the sadness of the longing for the fulfilling of the needs, the particular feelings are pointing to. This transformation reconnects us with our life energy, by sensing the “beauty and fullness of these fulfilled needs” in us.

My understanding of this transformation practice has been formed through many recordings of his workshops, in over 45 seminar days with Robert Gonzales and through my meanwhile 10 years of experience with this practice (both in self-experience and in guiding others). In this transformation practice I see seven important elements that can be practiced individually. The practice of these elements cultivates abilities that help us to transform the small and big suffering of life into mourning and life energy. These abilities can also help us to dissolve the effects of traumas.

I believe every successful psychotherapist works more or less with those aspects that these seven elements address. However, probably mostly unconsciously, because most of these abilities are not considered in the theories of the established therapy methods. I also believe that the seven elements should be considered in *any empathic support*.

Exercising these abilities not only helps us to dissolve suffering, it also protects us from new suffering. It helps us to process more or less frustrating, stressful, disappointing, annoying or otherwise disturbing or unpleasant experiences of our everyday life. Generally speaking, it helps us with the everyday “emotional care” that we humans need in order not to “harden” and to live in relaxation, with energy and joy of living.

With increasing practice in the elements of this practice, not only does awareness grow about why we actually feel what we feel, but also why we do what we do - a true self-awareness is growing...

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## I. Introduction

In working with my own internal and external conflicts, as well as in all my personal relationships and also in guiding people in difficulties, I have been increasingly using the principles of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as well as the NVC transformation practice of Robert Gonzales for many years. I have increasingly come to appreciate both, because both are still very much supporting me personally in all relationships and the inevitable<sup>1</sup> conflicts therein. The main reason for this supportive effect, and also the uniqueness about NVC, is the possibility of "translating" the impulses and tendencies in me or others into needs and thus making them compassionately understandable. This facilitates mutual understanding remarkably.

The NVC of  
Marshall Rosenberg  
and the NVC-  
Transformation  
Practice of Robert  
Gonzales

NVC has been developed by Marshall Rosenberg since the 1970s out of the Humanistic Psychology (he was a student of Carl Rogers). Robert Gonzales is one of the most experienced NVC trainers and in the last 10 years he has developed a transformation practice based on NVC using methods from other approaches. This transformation practice has now become the most effective basis for becoming aware of the true reasons for one's own will and for the inner conflict resolution that I know of.

In applying this transformation practice to my own challenges and in supporting others, I have noticed that seven elements can be distinguished. I call them "seven elements of self-healing" because they ultimately help to "process" painful experiences so that we are at peace with them. When we are at peace with the past, we are no longer afraid that it will happen again - and that is "healing" for me. So we are no longer afraid of burning ourselves again at the "hotplate". Of course that does not mean that we don't pay attention – in the contrary we have learned even better from the painful experience! After all, we don't need fear to be able to take care of our well-being – we need to be aware.

These seven elements can be found in Marshall Rosenberg's "healing sessions" (a certain kind of role plays) as well as in the transformation processes of Robert Gonzales (see [living-compassion.org](http://living-compassion.org)) and others. I assume that these elements are at least partially addressed in all successful psychotherapies – although often not consciously. They seem necessary for the process of clarification of inner conflicts to lead to clarity, compassion and empowerment and thus to be transforming and healing.

Transformation  
processes that  
address the seven  
elements lead to  
clarity, compassion  
and empowerment

**If in a transformation process one or more of these elements are not considered, then in my experience the effect is clearly weakened or not sustainable. Or we even "get stuck",** i.e. our inner conflict and the unpleasant emotions connected with it do not dissolve and we get out of the process with less energy. I have experienced the latter again and again both with myself and with others and it has often led to increasing resistance against this "inner work".

The seven elements are not only in line with the principles of NVC, but their application even requires knowledge and implementation of the assumptions and principles of NVC. Especially the empathic attitude and the conviction that all actions of people are motivated by universal needs and that any judgement and blame or devaluative interpretation is an unclear and tragic expression of pain are important components. The Blame and judgements are unclear because they do not make it clear what we are really talking about and they are tragic because, although they can provide important information of the related conflict, they are difficult to hear and therefore tend to escalate the conflict and make it more difficult to find a solution. In short: blame and

<sup>1</sup> In fact, conflicts are important indicators of the necessity to find new ways that work better for everybody. To be able to see it this way and to learn to use conflicts for solutions, it is necessary though to have the required resources (knowledge, energy, methods and people who can support) available.

judgements do not clearly express what it is all about and make it more likely that the "other side" tries to protect itself by defence or attack – regardless of whether this "other side" is an part within ourselves or another human being.

Because the NVC transformation practice of Robert Gonzales and also the "seven elements of self-healing" are based on NVC and deal above all with inner conflicts, I also call them "inner NVC". This also seems justified to me because the seven elements, just like NVC, promote the "non-judgmental, open and compassionate attitude towards oneself and others" (a definition for "NVC-attitude") as well as the awareness of what "non-violent action" means and what it doesn't mean; what promotes peace and what doesn't; what creates connection and what separates ...

The „Inner NVC“

Each of these seven elements can be practiced as a single exercise and I believe we benefit greatly from using these exercises in everyday life because they help to strengthen the ability to deal with all the unpleasant aspects of life (frustration, stress, anxiety, resignation, helplessness, tension, heaviness...) in a healthy way. And thus to transform all discomfort eventually into life energy. These exercises represent an effective "mental hygiene".

To use the discomfort of everyday life

Especially for the preparation for future recurring patterns/situations we can use all seven elements in a transforming process where we look at those situations that have passed and are still emotionally alive in us and we can learn from them. These past situations can be 1 second or 30 years ago, they only have to be "alive", i.e. when we think about them, we sense emotional and/or bodily reactions. In such a process, the unpleasant in us that becomes alive in regard of the concrete situation will be transformed through "applied love" in form of sadness or joy into the underlying life energy of the "beauty and fullness of the fulfilled needs". Thus we relax and experience more empowerment and joy of living.

To transform all discomfort into relaxation, empowerment and joy of living

This text can only give a brief overview. Although the elements often seem simple and understandable, in my experience it is necessary to introduce and experience the effects of each element in order to actually use and benefit from them in everyday life. Otherwise at best it is just another nice, inspiring text ...

## II. Well-being through the Seven Elements of Self-Healing

Probably everyone would like to arrange his environment in a way that is good for them. Above all probably everyone wants to avoid everything unpleasant. The temptation to want to achieve well-being directly is very great. For reasons of principle, however, it is impossible to achieve lasting well-being in this way. Even if we belong to the one percent of the richest people in the world, who own 40% of the world's wealth, we cannot avoid pain. For example every human being will ultimately lose everything he loves – at the latest when he dies. This is an inevitable fact of life. To meet the pain of loss, we can e.g. numb ourselves or distract ourselves from the pain. This way is very tempting, but has disadvantages. On the one hand we not only reduce painful feelings, but we also numb our pleasant feelings or cut ourselves off completely from them. On the other hand, we become addicted to narcotics and distractions, because we have no practice in dealing with painful feelings.

This is probably the main reason for the development of addictions – whether through legal or illegal drugs, medication or through activities such as shopping, work, sports, games, the Internet. Anything that is fun can be used to numb down unpleasant feelings or distract from them and thus can lead to addiction. Even the most tempting things in our society, such as success,

The cause of dependency and addiction: Avoiding the discomfort...

money, beauty and power, can be used to avoid unpleasant sensations and can lead to addiction.

Another and much more promising way to achieve well-being is to accept completely everything what is. But why should "accepting what is" lead to well-being and what does "accepting" mean anyway?

To avoid misunderstandings: Accepting what "is" has nothing to do with "*allowing everything*". "Accepting what is" means finding peace with what has already happened (a second or 30 years ago). This inner peace helps us to stay connected with our life energy and thus to have most power to influence things – if it is necessary *and* possible. I believe that this is also true for external circumstances, but it is especially true when it comes to our feelings and it is essential there. Unfortunately, unpleasant feelings are often referred to as "negative" feelings, which makes it difficult to accept and understand them compassionately.

Accepting the feelings that are alive in us in any moment makes sense because they cannot be changed by any power in the world for they are there already. Even if they change already in the next moment, they are there in this moment. Resistance to feelings that are alive is almost like trying to change the past. This resistance is not only meaningless, it is also the actual cause of unnecessary suffering. If we discern suffering from pain, we can even say that resistance is the real cause of all suffering. As mentioned, pain is an unavoidable part of life and it is also not even by itself uncomfortable for us humans (which e.g. those people who inflict pain on themselves prove). But suffering is avoidable because it is caused by the interpretations of the circumstances and the resistance to the pain that lies underneath those interpretations.

The exercise of the seven elements aims exactly at this relation. Through the compassionate understanding of the resistance and the related interpretations, as well as the pain, the unpleasant feelings are transformed into grief and life energy. Thus the avoidable suffering is being dissolved. We find our *peace with the past* (if it's one second or 30 years ago) and this peace gives us power for the present and makes us free to be more non-violent in the future, i.e. we are able to acknowledge our own needs and those of other people better...

Before I come to the seven elements, I would like to point out one more thing: The seven elements that I see in Robert Gonzales' NVC transformation practice are not "steps" that we have to take one after the other. They each represent a particular exercise that is associated with a particular experience. Some look very similar to each other<sup>2</sup>, but they practice different aspects. I believe that each of these exercises is important to be practiced in order to eventually increase the ability to transform suffering or to not let it arise at all.

At the same time, the order in which I present the seven elements also roughly follows the "normal" course of a transformation process. But this can only be a rough guide, because the order is always new from what is currently. It is mainly about paying attention to all seven elements.

## 1. The first element: separating the stimulus from the interpretations

This element aims to gain clarity about the stimulus of emotional pain (which is often not easy) and to separate it from interpretations (which is usually difficult). This corresponds to the first step of the NVC, with the focus on the actual stimulus, i.e. on what stimulates the uncomfortable (or comfortable<sup>3</sup>)

<sup>2</sup> For example, the elements 3 and 4a both focus on sensing the blame and judgmental thinking in the body – but with a different focus.

<sup>3</sup> The seven elements can not only be used to process painful experiences and dissolve the associated pointless resistance, but they also help to process pleasant experiences and dissolve the associated suffering attachment.

An alternative to avoidance:  
Accepting the discomfort completely...

...and understanding compassionately what the discomfort wants to "say"

The seven elements are individual practices and not "steps" !

The first element: practising to identify and clarify the trigger

feelings and sensations. To describe the stimulus, 1-2 short sentences are usually sufficient (the shorter and more to the point, the better) and it is very helpful to write down the sentences, because that supports the clarification of what is challenging for us in each case.

If we regularly write down the stimuli of our unpleasant feelings and process them afterwards in a transformation process with the seven elements, we not only practice becoming aware of what the stimulus is in each case. We also experience again and again that the actual cause of our suffering is our interpretations and we practice to recognize these interpretations and to separate them from the "pure" trigger. This helps especially with recurring triggers to find ways to deal more appropriately with the situations. But the most important thing is that in this way we process our uncomfortable or painful experiences and liberate ourselves more and more from them.

By writing down and exploring unpleasant experiences, we can clarify the respective situations still much later and thus prevent us from skipping over them and from accumulating unpleasant experiences. It is sufficient to write down the stimulus in key points in order to be able to explore it later.

Precious "collection of material" to develop inner freedom of inner freedom

The accumulation of unpleasant experiences is perhaps the most important cause of suffering in our society. It even seems to be the most important (co-)cause of addictions and chronic diseases<sup>4</sup>.

By noting down the stimuli of unpleasant feelings we get a very precious "material collection" for processing and thus healing unpleasant experiences them. This "inner work" is an important contribution to personal development and self-knowledge – and thus to the development of inner freedom; our actual freedom.

In a transformation practice the first element is the "anchor" for the process. Without it, it can easily happen that we jump from situation to situation in the process – which ultimately confuses rather than clarifies and keeps us caught up in thinking. There is no transformation in thinking, because, like in general for every learning process, feelings are needed (see e.g. in German the brain researcher Gerald Hüther in: "[Gelassenheit hilft: Anregung für Gehirnbenuzter](#)"). This anchor is the connection between our unpleasant feelings and what has actually happened.

The clarification of the trigger as the basis of healing

The practice of this element is also helpful in not ignoring the challenges of everyday life that stimulate uncomfortable feelings. It happens very easily that we simply forget the everyday stimuli, or perhaps better: that we repress them. However, this usually leads to us repressing the unpleasant and "accumulating" it in us. The result of this accumulation is that at some point we either "explode", i.e. we react inappropriately in situations that remind us of it. Or our body falls ill because it is constantly stressed by the accumulated discomfort.

The accumulation also means that we have to avoid such or similar situations and limit ourselves in this way. At least we have a harder time reaching a free decision – we have to react "as usual". In any case, we lose inner freedom.

## 2. The Second Element: Enjoy the "Jackal Show" – Clarifying and Hearing the Thoughts

The thoughts related to the stimulus (blame, judgments and other interpretations), however, do not want to be ignored - they want to be heard and the energy of these "inner voices" wants to be felt and sensed in the body

The second element: practising to become clear about one's own thoughts

<sup>4</sup> Gabor Maté, a Canadian physician, is convinced, for example, that an important contributory cause to addictions and chronic illnesses is traumatisation, especially in childhood (see youtube.com : "Trauma, Healing and The Brain..." in English).

so that they can "relax" and become calm again, because now their function of warning / indicating "hungry" needs is fulfilled.

Judgmental thoughts and interpretations in the sense of the moral categories good/bad, good/bad, right/wrong, "innocence"/"guilt" can also be called "guilt and merit thinking". In this thinking it is about addressing and blaming what is morally accusable, or about morally praising or justifying behaviour or conditions. This applies to subtle as well as to extreme situations. The sentences: "You left the window open, that's why there are mosquitoes in the room now," and even: "You threw the glass down," basically require the same guilt thinking as the sentences: "You hit me with your car and now I'm in a wheelchair because of you," or: "You cheated on me!"

The „guilt- and merit-thinking“

But it's not only in blaming that guilt thinking has an effect. It is also hidden in praise. When we praise, we interpret something that is pleasant for us or someone else, with moral categories, i.e. as morally attributable. Then we say: "You did a good job!" instead of perhaps: "I'm so happy that you did this".

The „merit-thinking“ in praising ...

If we get stuck in guilt thinking, the obvious step is to justify our own behavior with the guilt of others, or to explain the circumstances under which we suffer with the guilt of others. We justify violence against others (and even against ourselves) by saying that "evildoers" must be punished. But we also justify privileges/advantages we have in comparison to others by saying that we "deserve it". The thinking in terms of merit is connected with the thinking in terms of guilt. The thought: "He/She deserves the punishment" and the thought: "He/She deserves the holidays" follow the same logic. Both guilt thinking with blame and praise, and merit thinking with punishment and merit assume that we are free in our actions. That if we had done something that someone interprets as "good" or "bad" (who and why actually?), we could have acted differently. So guilt and merit thinking disguise the fact that we are all children of our social environment and have been shaped by it without having had any influence on it. These imprints are usually unconscious, but they influence our actions. As adults, we can become aware of our imprints and then detach ourselves from them. However, this requires "shadow work" <sup>1</sup>, which even in our western societies is still hardly known. And it takes time and energy that few adults can invest here, because everyone is more or less forced to "earn a living". So it is normal that most people have not become aware of their own imprints until they die - and believe that they have lived their lives out of their own freedom or lack of freedom...

Guilt-thinking entails justification, merit-thinking and privileges.

I believe there is a life-enriching purpose behind guilt thinking. I believe it wants to promote socially desirable behaviour (supporting other people, contributing to the community, ...) and prevent socially undesirable behaviour (hurting others, harming the community, ...). In my opinion, the underlying longing is for a world in which all people treat each other with consideration. That such a world has not yet arisen through guilt thinking is shown by the well over two thousand years of history of most religions, which have above all used and promoted the moral categories. People who actually wanted to make others "good people" have repeatedly hurt and traumatized people in the name of their religion and its moral categories - and thus kept the cycle of violence going. And that still happens today. The guilt-thinking really doesn't seem to have been very successful to me.

The need behind guilt-thinking: consideration

Although we don't know how things would have turned out differently, today we can see more clearly than ever that thinking in guilt promotes fear and not what is actually desired: love and "all-sided consideration". We can clearly see this from the perspective of non-Harming, which has been successful again in the modern world especially since Gandhi - Gandhi called it Ahimsa.

In my opinion, there is also a longing behind "merit thinking", which we all certainly can understand. If we think we "deserve" something, we want compassionate understanding and recognition for how uncomfortable

The need behind merit-thinking: compassionate understanding and recognition

something was for us, i.e. how unpleasant e.g. a job was again and again, or what painful side effects it had for us (maybe e.g. the neglect of friendships or other relationships, which then broke apart). Even if we believe that someone else deserves a punishment, it is always about understanding and recognition - here for the injuries that have happened...

Money, by the way, is now a common way of getting this recognition. This is promoted in particular by the capitalist economic system, which has now established itself practically all over the world. Money as a means of recognition is promoted here because it has become particularly important through it. Unfortunately, money also gives a great deal of power and has a coercive effect on practically everyone. Above all, it tempts practically everyone to force themselves. Thus money has many harmful side-effects for the community - and the logic of the capitalist economic system and the economic sciences also directly promote behaviour harmful to community, because the "homo economicus", i.e. the person who is exclusively interested in maximizing his own benefit, is seen there as the only "rationally" acting person, and thus rewards and promotes him<sup>5</sup>. In addition, money is also an unsuitable means of gaining recognition - and the usually more important need for compassionate understanding is not at all nurtured - rather on the contrary.

Money as a means for recognition

But already the guilt-thinking, as well as the merit-thinking prevent unfortunately often that we learn to treat each other more considerately, because it prevents compassionate understanding, and thus an understanding of the needs, which are in play in each case. Authentic consideration, however, requires that we recognize compassionately both our own needs and those of others. This means that we need to understand compassionately what others are really about - and that is only really possible if we also understand compassionately what we are really about. We also need to be able to nurture our own needs in a way that does as little harm to ourselves or others as possible, otherwise we suffer and tend to be a danger to ourselves and/or others, because when our needs are "hungry" we are in distress.

Guilt- and merit-thinking prevent even authentic consideration

Only if we have experienced consideration through other people and have learned to understand our needs and to feed them in a considerate way, will we really be able to want to be considerate from the heart, i.e. authentically. If and to the extent that our needs remain hungry, we will inevitably be at least subtly in survival mode. In survival mode it is just about individual survival and the consideration of others is blocked, or at least there is less capacity to be considerate of others because compassion and understanding are blocked here. In my opinion, this applies more or less to every human being! If you look at it this way, it becomes clear how important it is that all people can nurture their needs if we want to end violence!

Unfortunately, guilt and merit thinking inhibit such insights – and thus also that we learn from problems and conflict, because compassionate understanding is particularly important in this context. This is particularly tragic in the case of chronic illnesses, for example, which many see as an expression of prolonged violence against oneself (= disregard for one's own needs). Although it is repeatedly proven that, for example, unresolved unpleasant feelings trigger the respective illness and that a relaxed and joyful emotional state considerably accelerates recovery, this truth can hardly be conveyed to patients because it must inevitably be interpreted as "Then I myself am to blame?". Even if there were knowledge in the medical field how to deal with unpleasant feelings in a healthy way (which unfortunately is hardly the case, because especially in the medical field for various reasons an above-average

Guilt- and merit-thinking hinder learning ...

<sup>5</sup> The fact that economic sciences are therefore just not a non-normative science, as they pretend, is concealed.

amount of violence against oneself prevails), guilt thinking would prevent using these possibilities.

... and even healing

If I became ill through "my own" violence, that would ultimately mean that I am also to blame for my illness - and that must not be. The knowledge alone that if I had been more friendly and considerate with myself and others, then I might not have become ill, would have been too painful! So it must not be - and therefore it cannot be. Unfortunately this leads to the fact that I also do not contribute anything to become healthy - and that I am completely dependent on the medical treatment.

Everyone wants to fight illnesses and even "negative feelings" just as much as violence and crime - and unfortunately overlooks important (co-)causes and thus also important possibilities to support healing and well-being.

Here, "guilt and merit thinking" usually prevents patients from getting support to deal with their uncomfortable feelings in a healthier way. Not to label uncomfortable feelings as "negative feelings" any more and not to want to get rid of them would be an important step in a direction that promises to be more life enriching.

"Guilt and merit thinking" in general inevitably obscures the view on what really is, because they lead to negative (or positive) emotional prejudices. In other words: if we consider devaluating (or even valorizing) thoughts to be true, they affect us and obscure our view of their true meaning. The extreme implications of this effect can also be found in expressions such as "blind hatred" or "love makes you blind".

In connection with guilt thinking, it should also be noted that we need another concept of "being responsible" if we want to free ourselves from guilt and merit thinking. This is an important topic that I don't want to go into here for reasons of space. Just this much can be said here: the new concept of responsibility must be free of guilt thinking itself and is therefore independent of whether I could have acted differently or not (which is unprovable anyway). I am responsible for my actions even if I could not have known the consequences before.

I see the following three aspects of this new responsibility that need to be taken into account:

A new concept of "being responsible" is needed

To take responsibility for what I did or didn't do, I want:

- 1) To listen and learn to understand compassionately what consequences my doing or not doing had for others and how painful it was for them,
- 2) to learn from what has happened in order to be able to act differently in the future,
- 3) to limit any damage and, if necessary, to make amends.

In NVC, "guilt thinking" is seen as a warning signal pointing to something important. On the other hand, it prevents us from understanding the real meaning behind guilt thinking (and thus from really understanding ourselves or the others) if we believe it, i.e. see it as the truth.

To speak out loud the blaming and judgmental thoughts and to feel them with their authentic energy, as well as to feel their physical effects, is an "inner listening" and an important preparation for a compassionate understanding of our thoughts (fourth element). This hearing of our "guilt thinking" with our whole being (with thinking, feeling and sensing) frees suffering energy, which is otherwise held in the body and becomes noticeable there again and again in the form of unpleasant sensations.

Expressing the thoughts to oneself frees the energy

In order to be able to hear the individual blames and judgements, however, we must first make ourselves aware of them - and this second element serves this purpose. This awareness is often made easier by letting the discomfort speak, which is awakened in us in connection with the corresponding stimulus, i.e. by expressing this discomfort through words. Often the blames and judgments lie

hidden in the story about the situation and must be "peeled out" and brought to the point - this requires some skills.

If the thoughts are written down, we can make them more conscious and lose the fear of them - and finally clarify them. It is important for all those who hear/read the thoughts to keep the awareness that the judgmental thoughts are not the truth (not even if they are shared by others!!) - and therefore one must not "believe" them. Such thoughts are indeed illusions that only point to old pain and/or hungry needs.

Writing the thoughts down supports clarity

Some people have concerns about expressing or even writing down their judgmental thoughts, because they believe that they would become reality. Our thinking does indeed have great power, as the various approaches to "positive thinking" and also the effects of "self-fulfilling prophecies" show. However, this transformation practice is about making semi-conscious or unconscious thoughts conscious. So these thoughts are actually already there and have been having an effect on us for a long time already. Therefore the effect is not intensified by writing them down and expressing them, but it is finally dissolved by the transformation.

I myself have not paid enough attention to this second element in my own inner work for many years. Interestingly enough, although I knew about the meaning and although when guiding others, I made sure that the judgmental thinking was expressed and heard that way. Marshall Rosenberg called this listening to one's own blame and judgments, the "jackal show".

The reason for neglecting my thoughts was above all that I was still too afraid to judge. Especially in my childhood I had experienced myself how painful it is to be judged and I therefore did not want to know anything about judgements. So I still believed the judgements myself. As a result, I generally had a tendency to overlook my own "jackal thoughts" and thus to neglect my "jackal show".

This experience showed me once again how easily we humans can fool ourselves. We just can't see our own blind spots (otherwise there wouldn't be any ;-). And meanwhile I also believe we can't avoid to project onto others these blind spots; our "shadows" / unconscious parts / the things we reject about ourselves. For example, we are annoyed when we believe that what we reject in ourselves we see in others. Such projections are unavoidable and also inevitably unconsciousness and therefore it is crucial to turn care for one's own shadows if we really want to understand other people. And because the shadows are invisible to ourselves, we need other people and certain methods to become more conscious and to heal.

"What you perceive is what you project" - the others are our "mirrors"

An NVC transformation practice that considers the seven elements is indeed a therapeutic method that addresses this problem – and it is not the only one. Many methods, from psychoanalysis to Byron Katie's "The Work" to Ken Wilber's "3-2-1 Process", focus on these projections of our shadows. The book of wisdom "A Course in Miracles" sums up this problem with the following words: "What you perceive is what you project" - and the hints for our projections are our interpretations and evaluations.

In the second element, we must remember that judgmental thoughts can be "contagious" when those who hear them lose awareness that judgments are only "tragic" expressions of the needs involved. "Tragic" because they are unclear and therefore misleading and harmful. For example, if we are guiding someone in their inner clarification and lose this consciousness and "believe" the evaluative thought, we can easily lose the connection to ourselves and thus the connection to the one we are guiding. In such a case, it is best to take a break and practice self-empathy, or even break off and seek support from others.

Thoughts can be contagious!

To "scold", to agree to interpretations, or to "pity" gives the interpretations rather more reality and power. The same applies to resistance to it, such as justification<sup>6</sup>, excuses, relativization, talking out of it etc. . All this keeps the person concerned trapped in his unconsciously created "prison of thoughts" and thus in his suffering.

### 3. The Third Element: To Embrace the Discomfort in Us

Even if we humans are often not aware of it, the fear of the unpleasant feelings and sensations *in us* is a strong force and influences our actions considerably. We want to avoid the discomfort *in us*, as if it means a great danger for us. This is understandable, because the discomfort is mostly linked to old, extremely painful experiences we once had or to traumas we suffered – and our body, our feelings and sensations want to protect us from having such painful experiences again.

But if we don't really "understand" the discomfort – and by that I mean: if we don't realize what the discomfort in us longs *for us*, i.e. if we don't "compassionately understand" it, we can't take good care of ourselves because we don't know what we really want. Then the discomfort is simply unpleasant and we tend to protect ourselves from it. This leads, for example, to the widespread fear of fear.

Probably already as a child everyone has developed behaviour patterns to avoid the discomfort – unfortunately they are no longer helpful for us as adults and also not healthy for our body because they strain it. If we do not understand what the unpleasant feelings and sensations want to tell us, we are not only afraid of new painful experiences, but also of the discomfort that wants to warn us about them...

Learning to welcome the discomfort without resistance and to deal with it compassionately – *without wanting to do or change anything* – is perhaps the greatest challenge of our emotional development. That was so, at least for me and for many of those I supported. And only the ability to perceive the unpleasant inner experience compassionately would be a healing alternative to the two conventional methods in our society: on the one hand the "pulling together" / "biting one's teeth" (ignoring, suppressing, distracting, giving up, ...), which probably everyone has learned at school at the latest and which is mostly the source of violence against oneself (disregarding one's own needs), and on the other hand the "banging on the table" (living it out, asserting oneself,...), which everyone someday does somehow and which is usually the source of violence against others (disregarding the needs of others).

Both strategies are an attempt to protect us from drowning in the unpleasant experience and just suffering. However, both strategies lead us to close our eyes more or less to the pain that is always an inseparable part of life and to develop fear of it. We are afraid of loss and pain because we don't know how to deal with it...

In order to be able to develop the capacity of the third element to perceive the discomfort in us compassionately and to welcome it, it is important to leave the "I-perspective" of the person concerned and to meet ourselves, so to speak, from the outside, from the "perception world of the compassionate observer", from the perspective of the "loving mother/father". The exercise is therefore about holding ourselves compassionately so to speak from "outside". So to give the "child" in us what we as a child were longing so much for from our parents. This works with the body sensations often relatively easy. The

The third element:  
practising to  
compassionately accept  
all discomfort

The „compassionate  
observer“

<sup>6</sup> John Gottman lists four "Horsemen of the Apocalypse" in his book "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work" who are most harmful for relationships. Defensiveness/justification is one of them along with criticism, contempt and withdrawal.

thoughts are usually much more difficult to look at "from the outside" and to hold compassionately. We first have to detach ourselves from the identification with them, i.e. we have to loosen the belief in their reality (see the fourth element).

The ability to hold the body sensations sympathetically is also important because the unpleasant body sensations are usually "fed" again and again by thinking: the suffering intensifies. If we concentrate on body sensations and hold them compassionately, we stop this vicious circle.

A few years ago I had an experience that drastically showed me the importance of this element: I was with a friend in her car and she said something that was very unpleasant for me. I don't remember what it was anymore, but I still remember what I observed about myself: I wound myself physically - I didn't want to feel the discomfort that was alive in me at that moment, I wanted to avoid it. I could observe different impulses: going away / thinking of something else / distracting myself (escape), verbally fighting back (fight). In short: I wanted to do something – just not to have to feel the discomfort in me... At that time none of it was possible for me and after a while I managed to be compassionate with the discomfort in me (which I see as a "wounded part" of me). I could give it space and simply "be there" for the discomfort in me – and finally this discomfort could relax again...

An example of my own tendency to avoid the discomfort

As I said, in my experience, everyone is more or less afraid of unpleasant experiences. Usually this fear is hidden and unconscious. On closer examination it is not only behind every "not-wanting"/rejection/resistance. It is also behind every "wanting"/attachment/holding on to. Seeking success or power are widespread examples behind which there is usually (at least also) a fear. Everybody who feels such a "wanting", such an "inner pull" can easily check whether fear is involved. He/she only has to imagine having complete trust in life taking care of him/her. When the "wanting" becomes softer, or dissolves completely, the "fear part" has dissolved in trust and the parts of striving that are connected with a "pure longing" become noticeable – but no longer so compulsory and "reckless" towards oneself and others.

The fear in "wanting to have"

If we understand and transform fear in this way through the underlying longing, we can more easily see and respect our own needs as well as those of others, i.e. be "nonviolent"/"not harming". "Burnout" for example (as a result of prolonged violence against oneself, i.e. disregard for one's own needs) is then no longer possible, and overlooking the interests of others (external violence) is also less likely ...

I have already mentioned it above: This fear of the discomfort that so often drives us humans is, on closer examination, resistance to what is already there at the moment (the unpleasant feelings are already there when we feel them) - and, like any resistance to what is already there at that moment, it leads directly to suffering. As I said before, we can no longer perceive the interests of others or even of ourselves, let alone respect them when we are in fear. This is why Eugen Drewermann, for example, can write: "It is fear that makes us evil ..." (from "Heilende Religion - Überwindung der Angst", p. 57; not yet translated into English) – "being evil" can be translated here as "disregarding interests/needs" / "harming". And Drewermann continues to write: "... and it is evil that causes fear", because harming / disregarding interests/needs causes fear - fear of the pain caused by it. This interrelation can be called the "cycle of fear and violence" ...

Fear is what makes us "evil" and "evil" is what causes fear

C. G. Jung once said: "What you resist persists". It seems to me that this applies to both internal and external circumstances. For me, anyway, it usually became much more unpleasant when I wanted to "get rid" of the pain / discomfort or ignored it / overlooked it. If this "law of resistance" really is valid, it is also because of that an important competence to learn to welcome the

Das Unangenehme annehmen - ohne etwas zu tun oder darin zu "versinken"

unpleasant and to accept it compassionately, *without having to react / having to do something*.

This "accepting what is in this moment" is something completely different from "giving up". Giving up means losing hope that our needs can be nourished, it means disregarding one's own needs. "Accepting what is", on the other hand, is a prerequisite for gaining clarity about what is missing. In addition, "accepting what is" also increases the power for change; we gain power to nourish what we long for because we do not lose energy through useless resistance.

Accepting is something else than giving up

"Giving up" also means to "drown" in the discomfort, to be stuck in suffering. This happens, for example, in depression and it can be understood as a sign that we are still identified with corresponding thoughts, i. e. still "believe" these thoughts. We are then trapped in "guilt-thinking", i. e. that we "believe" thoughts such as "I still have it": "I don't deserve it!", "I'm not good enough!", "I'm bad!", "It'll never change!", etc. . This is why Marshall Rosenberg saw the depression as the result of violence against himself, i. e. disregard for his own needs. The "compassionate understanding" of the unpleasant (especially elements 4a and 4b) is the safest way to protect us from this violence, because it has the power to transform guilt thinking. It is important to note, however, that we always need friendly and effective support for this – at least that is my experience.

Depression:  
The belief in guilt keeps us trapped in suffering ...

Also, I now believe that when our actions (or inactions) are done out of the discomfort / out of distress, they often have (more) negative consequences or side effects. On the one hand, every action out of an energy of resistance is inevitably under the pressure of "not wanting to have" or "having to have". On the other hand, we are not yet aware of what it is really about for us, as long as we are still stuck in the discomfort.

However, when we have become aware of what the discomfort really means for us, i.e. which of our needs are "hungry" (Elements 4a and 4b) and we are in emotional connection with these needs, then not only do we know what it is really about, but we "sense" it - we experience it. In this emotional connection with our needs we are in a state of relaxation, empowerment and joy of living (in which of course there can be a lot of sadness and even grief). And if we act out of this state (or omit something), then it is "going for something", without fear of not getting it, i.e. without attachment - and our action has much greater power and influence than if we act out of resistance. From the place of resistance we rather fight the circumstances or the behaviour of others (or our own) and inevitably produce more resistance outside (or within ourselves).

Going for something is more powerful than resistance

From relaxation, empowerment and joy of living we provoke at least less resistance and the consequences of our actions tend to be more life serving. This is the experience I have had over and over again - both when I forgot and acted out of the resistance (which unfortunately still happens to me more often than I wish;-) and when I remembered it and was able to transform the discomfort into what I was really about at that moment.

**The experiences with this third element help me again and again to reduce my fear of the unpleasant (thoughts, feelings and body sensations) and to strengthen my confidence that I can deal with everything that may come. And this trust I also can call "trust in my self-efficacy" – and thus also "trust in myself". It is trust that is independent from the outside without me shutting myself off from the outside. It is a primal trust that I never would have lost if it had been nurtured sufficiently from outside when I was a child. A primal trust that I had lost because, like probably most people, I had traumatic experiences as a child – especially through the use of coercion ...**

Accepting the discomfort enhances our self-confidence

So there is a lot that speaks for practising this "compassionate acceptance of everything uncomfortable". ☺

#### 4. The Fourth Element: Solving the Identification with the Thinking Through Compassionate Understanding

The resistance against what is, respectively the attachment to what is, expresses itself, as already mentioned at the second element (chapter 2), in guilt and merit/deserve thinking. With the fourth element it is now a matter of solving the identification, i.e. the belief in the truth of guilt and merit thinking. In particular, there are three ways to do this.

On the one hand the consciousness can be strengthened for the fact that the evaluating and interpreting thinking has no other sense than to express a pain - and that otherwise it is illusory (element 4a). On the other hand, guilt thinking can be directly translated into the needs it refers to (Element 4b). And finally, the longing behind guilt thinking can be compassionately understood when we connect to the energy of the uncomfortable experience.

The thinking of guilt and merit basically serves to protect us from pain, which we cannot process at that moment. As a child we had needed this protection as far as we did not have (sufficient) compassionate support to process our painful experiences - and very few people in our society had such a support. The disadvantage of guilt thinking is that it just prevents us from compassionately coming into contact with the actual pain - and therefore it prevents us from processing that pain through compassionate understanding. It is basically a more or less severe traumatising that has happened. The pain cannot be released - it remains traumatic.

The best thing that can happen then is that we are never reminded of it again, because each remembrance touches the old pain again and makes it come alive. We are very sensitive in the points that remind us of the old pain, often really allergic. This is also called "trigger". In order to protect ourselves from this remembrance, we can try to avoid the "trigger situations" or the people who remind us of them. But this way we limit our possibilities more and more. We become prisoners of our triggers...

As adults, however, we also have the opportunity to find the compassionate support that helps us process even the most painful experiences - and thus free ourselves from the traumatizing effects. An NVC-transformation practice is an extremely effective possibility for this liberation. The solution of identification with guilt and merit thinking is an important prerequisite for a successful transformation, so that the unpleasant can dissolve in the sadness of the longing for and the joy of the fulfillment of the need(s).

Concretely, the solution of identification with guilt and merit thinking helps us to be able to see more clearly what we are really concerned with. This thinking is like clouds that obscure the view of what is real. In the following I describe the three possibilities to solve the identification with the interpretations in more detail.

##### a) Becoming aware: "I'm telling myself a story" ...

This ability is about practicing, regaining the consciousness that devaluing and also valorizing thoughts are not the reality, but simply a "tragic" because unclear and therefore ineffective expression of feelings and needs. The awareness of this connection can be achieved by placing a part of a sentence in front of the thought, e.g: "I am telling myself the story that ... [judgmental thought]", or: "I am noticing that I am thinking that ... [judgmental thought]", or even: "I am hallucinating that ... [judgmental thought]".

The application of this element is often sufficient if the judgmental thoughts have little emotional energy. It can quickly help to view thinking from the level of the "compassionate observer".

The fourth element:  
practising not to believe  
our judgmental thinking  
but understanding it  
compassionately

The guilt- and merit-  
thinking wants to  
protect us from pain -  
but keeps us trapped  
in suffering

Element 4c: practising to  
make oneself aware that  
guilt-thinking is  
illusory

In order that this does not lead to further splitting off and thus suppressing painful thoughts and thus our wounded parts, it is especially important in the case of thoughts with a high "emotional charge" to first really recognize and accept our thinking as our own. This happens by hearing and above all feeling the thoughts (second element) and then holding them compassionately (third element).

By the way, the reinforcement of separation and suppression is a danger to both meditation and "positive thinking". Ken Wilber in particular has shown this (see among others his book "Integral Spirituality").

In any case, this element is a simple method to make us conscious again and again of the "illusion of thinking" and to see thinking as what it can be at best: a tool (and as such it is all too often misused for unconscious motives).

### **b: Translating thinking into needs**

To translate thinking directly into needs is a classic element of NVC and it is probably taught in every introduction. I think it is a very important element because it teaches us what it is really about for us. At the same time, I would also like to point out a danger that I myself have succumbed to: I have often used this "translation" to "transform away" the discomfort in me, to make it "go away" by translating it into needs as quickly as possible.

This is not so problematic for thoughts with little emotional charge. Inner voices with high emotional charge, however, "defend themselves" because they were not heard with their energy and this energy remains as tension in the body. For me, this is an important reason why we sometimes cognitively understand what we are about and also use empathic words, but are rather distanced: we are not really "emotionally connected" to what we say because there is still resistance within us. Inner tension is a sure sign of this problem ...

Important "remedies" for this are the first two elements (to separate the stimulus from the thought and the "jackal show"). Especially the "jackal show" is important, so that the thoughts are really being heard and felt. In addition, the third element is also of great importance, because it helps to be able to keep the discomfort compassionately and thus to lose the fear of it.

### **c: Understanding the emotional energy compassionately**

This is one of the most important elements, because it has a very transforming effect and it seems necessary to dissolve core beliefs.

In this element, the compassionate understanding of what is uncomfortable for us (uncomfortable feelings and body sensations) is promoted by practicing to sense the longing of the concerned need. The resulting compassionate understanding makes it easier for us to welcome this discomfort in ourselves lovingly and compassionately - in this respect this element is connected with the third element (to accept the discomfort in us compassionately).

Element 4c, however, goes further: if we succeed in accepting compassionately, an access to the underlying longing opens up, i.e. an access to our need which is expressed in the unpleasant feeling. This longing is connected with pure grief (see fifth element), that solves, liberates and strengthens ...

This element 4c is especially helpful in hindering basic beliefs about life (e.g. "Life is dangerous!", "Life is a struggle!"), about oneself (e.g. "I am not good enough!", "I am not lovable!") or about others ("You cannot trust anyone", "Everybody is against me!"). The exercise of this element takes time and compassionate assistance. In my opinion it is not "applicable" to high "emotional charge" (i.e. to particularly unpleasant thoughts, feelings and/or body sensations) without such an assistance.

Element 4b: practising to translate thoughts into feelings and needs

Element 4c: practising to welcome, feel and understand the discomfort within us with compassion.

## 5. The Fifth Element: Natural Mourning and Celebration

Mourning and celebrating occurs especially in the practice of elements 4a and 4b and of the sixth element. The fifth element, however, is about practicing it specifically. So to practice to allow the naturally arising sadness as well - and also to enjoy it - as the naturally arising joy. At first glance, this seems absurd: how can we enjoy sadness? In fact, sadness, which is free of resigning or judgmental thoughts, is basically an expression of compassion and thus an expression of love - and that is why this sadness is also solving and relieving and just as alive as joy. Whenever we were sad and felt better/strengthened afterwards, we were at least for moments in this pure sadness ...

The fifth element:  
practising to  
consciously enjoy  
sadness and joy

However, we cannot come to mourning if we do not know what we are really about, i.e. if we do not yet know our needs and thus our longing. We will also shy away from mourning unless we have the confidence to be able to endure the pain. All that remains then is the resistance against the painful or the discomfort, and we have to evade it or distract ourselves - or else we drown in it. In other words: If and as long as we cannot mourn a pain and see and celebrate the joy that lies in it, we get stuck in suffering ...

As long as we cannot  
mourn something  
painful, we remain  
stuck in the respective  
suffering

Joy is often also a challenge, because fear can easily come: Fear of losing again what we rejoice in, or fear of not getting enough of it. Or we get afraid of consequences because we think for example that we don't deserve it. All this thinking brings us out of the present moment and prevents us from experiencing and enjoying the joy of the moment.

However, the relief through the practice of this element is particularly easy to feel in the case of painful or unpleasant experiences. For me, the non-mourning and non-celebrating that I used to know so well in the past had a high price. I still remember the difficulties I had at the beginning of my time with NVC to feel and sense what was in me. Therefore I could feel neither really sadness, nor really joy.

Khalil Gibran has put it nicely in his booklet "The Prophet": "But if in your fear you seek only the rest and the lust of love, then it is better for you to cover your nakedness and go from the threshing floor of love to the world without seasons where you will laugh, but not all your laughter, and weep, but not all your tears. "<sup>7</sup>

Only he who cries all  
his tears can laugh all  
his laughter...

I think "thrill seeking" is basically a consequence of the difficulty to feel one's feelings - as well as "self-mutilating behaviour".

To cultivate natural mourning and celebration and to create a place for them in life is probably crucial for integrating body, feelings and thinking and to process both painful and pleasurable experiences, i.e. to find peace with the past.

By the way, Ken Wilber calls the in this way "integrated" human being "centaur" - and this "centaur" opens the way to the consciousness of the second rank (cf. e.g. Ken Wilber, "Integral Spirituality") - to the prejudice-free appreciation of all human beings as human beings ...

## 6. Das sechste Element: Die „Schönheit und Fülle der erfüllten Bedürfnisse“

The sixth element is the most powerful, but it cannot unfold without practice in the other elements - especially because it tempts one to ignore or avoid the discomfort and pain. But since painful experiences are unavoidable in life (e.g. we will again and again lose people or things we love), we limit ourselves by this avoidance and our fear of the unpleasant even becomes stronger. This is

The sixth element:  
practising to revive the  
beauty and fullness of  
the fulfilled needs

<sup>7</sup> Khalil Gibran, „About love“, in: „The Prophet“

the trap of hedonism<sup>8</sup>. This trap can also be described as a preference for Eros (masculine energy / passion) and a lack of Agape (feminine energy / compassion). According to Wilber this leads to Phobos, the "fear of the shadow" (see below Appendix 2: "Eros and Agape - Wisdom and Compassion - Method and Empathy").

Together with the other elements, however, the connection with the "beauty and fullness of fulfilled needs" helps us to reconnect with our life energy, i.e. with our energy and joy of living. This element has probably the strongest transformational effect and it is ideally the climax of a transformation process. Here it is important that we come into contact with the respective need in such a way that we actually feel in the NOW how it feels like in our body ...

As a means for this connection, we can either remember a situation in which the need was fully met, or imagine such a situation. Often sadness comes up again, because we feel how precious it is to us to "nurture" this need / how much we long for it. Sadness wouldn't be there if what we miss hadn't been enjoyable. If sadness comes up, it is important to mourn it, i.e. to welcome this sadness and feel it in the body until it vanishes again.

Khalil Gibran has also written something suitable about this: "If you are happy, look deep into your hearts, and you will find that only that which has caused you sorrow also gives you joy. When you are sad, look again into your hearts and you will see that the truth weeps for that which has given you pleasure."<sup>9</sup>

Joy and sadness  
are intertwined

When we have difficulty connecting with the "beauty and fullness of fulfilled needs" it is often a sign that we have not sufficiently clarified the connection between thoughts, feelings and body sensations (elements one to four).

## 7. The Seventh Element: Non-judgmental, compassionate perceiving

Non-judgmental, compassionate perceiving

The seventh element plays a special role because it is not only the basis of NVC, but also the practice goal of many wisdom traditions: the open, non-judgmental, compassionate perceiving. The dwelling in this state is described as follows:

The seventh element:  
practising to perceive  
with an open heart

- In Christianity: Dwelling in the "Holy Spirit"
- In Buddhism: Dwelling in the "Nature of Mind"
- In the GFK: An "open, nonjudgmental attitude towards myself and others" (NVC awareness).

In the transformation practice of Robert Gonzales, this "open, nonjudgmental, compassionate perceiving" is achieved after the thoughts are transformed. The thoughts, in connection with the trigger, can be understood as a fog that obscures the clear view on "what is" / "what it really is about for us". If we look at the trigger after the thoughts have been transformed and thus dissolved, i.e. after the "fog" has cleared, we see more clearly "what is" / "what we really care about" ...

When the "mist of  
thoughts" clears,  
prejudice-free  
perception becomes  
possible

If we have clarified our thoughts in relation to the trigger and come into this prejudice-free, compassionate perceiving, it can happen that we are at peace with the situation and no longer want to do anything. This is especially the case if the trigger did not actually have any painful consequences for us directly, but only triggered subtle or strong fears, i.e. resistance and thus discomfort, because it reminded us of earlier painful experiences.

This resistance to what is emerges in the form of "not wanting to have" and also in the form of "wanting to have". In Buddhism, which I regard as the most

In Buddhism:  
The three "poisons of  
mind" that lead to  
suffering

<sup>8</sup> The orientation of life towards pleasure and joy while avoiding all discomfort.

<sup>9</sup> Khalil Gibran, „About joy and sorrow“, in: „The Prophet“

developed "science of inner experience" (see Appendix 4: "The necessary integration of body, mind and emotions"), these are two of the three "poisons of mind" that lead to suffering ("hate"/rejection and "greed"/attachment). The third poison of mind is "ignorance", "not wanting to know"/"not wanting to look". The third is the most important because it obscures the causes of suffering and therefore leads us into suffering again and again.<sup>10</sup>

In Buddhism, the following "remedies" are recommended in case these "mental poisons" are active: In case of attachment/"wanting to have": generosity, in case of rejection/"not wanting to have": Kindness, and in case of "not wanting to know": Wisdom (curiosity/open-mindedness). All these remedies can be seen as forms of "applied love" and their effectiveness can easily be verified by applying them to ones own simple cases.

... and the recommended remedies

The use of these remedies in everyday life in "hot situations", however, requires many years of intensive practice - here the seven elements are therefore a very helpful supplement that ultimately leads to the same thing: **living more and more in an open, non-judgmental, compassionate attitude towards oneself and others.**

## 8. The Seven Elements: Capacities for relaxation, empowerment and joy of living

All seven elements are basically "**self-connection exercises**". Self-connection here means the connection between thinking, feeling and sensing. Through this, we are "connected to ourselves" and can feel directly which of our needs are "nourished" or "hungry"<sup>1</sup>. We feel the sadness of the longing for "being nourished" or the joy of "being nourished". Only this longing or this joy shows us what it is really all about for us - and the experience of the "beauty and abundance of fulfilled needs" gives us the energy and creativity to find ways to nurture these needs optimally.

The seven practices help to come into contact with what is important to us and to find life-enriching ways

If these ways are sought from a place of distress, in general: from the unpleasant experience (which is unfortunately the norm if we do not become aware of this problem and are not practiced in the seven elements), then both our creativity and our ability to consider our own needs as well as the needs of others are very limited. Thus the probability that we will find life-enriching solutions for everyone is greatly reduced - we inevitably hurt others or ourselves with our actions.

By having clarity about our needs and by being connected to these needs, we can more easily find ways to nurture ourselves without having "side effects", i.e. we can better care for ourselves without overlooking others.

By the way, this also promises to solve any tendency of addiction in a compassionate way. **Thus an NVC-transformation practice based on the seven elements is a promising possibility to contribute to the healing of addictions of all kinds.** To my knowledge, this is a possibility that has not yet been used. **The focus of such a therapy should be: Healing through support in developing compassionate understanding and loving care for oneself. And based on that: help in developing the ability of need-oriented self-care.**

A promising option for any type of addiction: compassionate caring and needs-oriented self-care.

And each of the seven elements can also be practiced intensively individually using different methods and thus developed and strengthened. To name just a few:

- Vipassana Meditation and Focusing help to get in touch with the discomfort in the body and to befriend one with it (third element).

<sup>10</sup> Buddhism by the way also names "five root sins", which include the "three poisons of mind" as well as "envy" and "pride". Especially pride is interesting because it is held so highly in our society. On closer inspection, however, it nourishes the illusion: "I can do it!". A "can do" that is always bought with a "can fail". Thus, fear of failure inevitably creeps in.

- Meditation helps to view the body, the feeling and the thinking "from outside": "I am not my body / my feeling / my thinking". (second, third and seventh element).

(Caution: Without "shadow work" there is the danger of suppression of and dissociation from the discomfort).

- "Positive thinking" can be seen as "de-identification" of the unpleasant thoughts and also as a weak expression of "beauty and abundance of needs" (fourth element).

(Caution: By identifying with comfortable thoughts we are subject to new restrictions in the long run and without "shadow work" there is also the danger of suppression of and dissociation from the discomfort).

The seven exercises of self-connection skills are all applied in Robert Gonzales' NVC-transformation processes and they help us to transform the resistance against what is unpleasant (tension, frustration, anger, worries, helplessness, anxiety, resignation, stress, ... and **even physical pain**) by welcoming, acknowledging and compassionate accepting/understanding it. All in all such a transformation process leads us out of the discomfort to relaxation, empowerment and joy of living. This also gives us more power to stand up for what we really want.

**In a transformation process, the individual elements each have the following effects:**

- Elements 1 (clarifying the stimulus), 2 (clarifying the thinking) and 3 (accepting the discomfort) help above all to clarify the situation. So they serve **clarity**.
- Elements 4 (Solving the identification with the thinking) and 5 (Celebrating and mourning) help to develop **compassion** for ourselves and others.
- Element 6 in particular brings us back into contact with our energy and joy of living. They bring **empowerment**.

In general such an NVC-transformation process leads to clarity, compassion and empowerment and leads out of the unpleasant experience, i.e. suffering, into **relaxation, empowerment and joy of living**.

The NVC  
transformation practice:  
Clarity –  
Compassion –  
Empowerment

relaxation,  
empowerment and joy  
of living in everyday life

### III. Appendix

#### 1. How I Came to This

**In my experience, it is not enough to process every few weeks the accumulated minor or major unpleasant experiences of our everyday life** (unless one lives in a cave and is not repeatedly confronted with triggers of one's own painful experiences ;-). In my experience, **we need a practice suitable for everyday life** to process our experiences, because only in this way can we sustainably free ourselves from the "discomfort" in us (the pain that is touched by the triggers), i.e. only in this way can we sustainably solve our inner conflicts and cultivate the "NVC consciousness" and thus really contribute to non-violence in the world.

I also call such a practice suitable for everyday use "psychohygiene" because it cleanses and cares for our psyche and thus makes it healthier and keeps it healthy. **The practice of the seven elements seems to me to be necessary for such an everyday practice.**

The exercise of the seven elements - mental hygiene for everyday life

In recent years I have also found that "empathy alone" (= to be compassionate with what appears without influencing it) is better than not to experience compassion, but it does not lead to a sustainable transformation of the discomfort and thus not to change. I would like to emphasize here that empathy is an important prerequisite for development because it helps to accept what is - but empathy alone does not lead to growth because it has no clarity and direction - empathy is therefore necessary, but not sufficient.

Empathy is necessary but not sufficient

At the beginning of my "NVC time" the experience of empathy was very healing for me. It nourished a deep longing that had been hungry for such a long time that I even had forgotten it. However, I had not yet gotten to know any transformation practice. I had gotten to know the "NVC dance floors"<sup>11</sup>, but there the elements 3, 4 and 6 in particular are not explicitly considered<sup>12</sup>.

But at first I didn't know anything about it. Above all, I knew "only" empathy. This circumstance led me personally to almost "give up" NVC again. At that time I had a "favorite trigger": My son had sat "day and night" at the computer and played "World of Warcraft" - and neglected his school and other activities. It was very painful for me to see that, and I felt helpless. I had been getting empathy again and again from my girlfriend back then and from others and I was getting better again and again and I had also gained confidence again and again. But when I saw my son sitting at the computer the next time, the same pain came up again. Empathy alone didn't really help me, there was no change. I found an explanation for this in Ken Wilber and the next chapter is about it: about Eros and Agape ...

At that time I was lucky to have received recordings of workshops by Robert Gonzales. There he supported people who had suffered severe trauma and helped them to transform the old pain. This impressed me very much and gave me hope again: **Change was possible even with severe traumatic wounds!**

Since then I have learned a lot from Robert Gonzales himself and I use his work for myself and in supporting others.

#### 2. Eros and Agape – Passion and Compassion – Method and Empathy

**In addition to "pure empathy" (compassion), according to Ken Wilber, clarity, structure and direction (wisdom) are also required.** We need, as

<sup>11</sup> Developed by Bridget Belgrave and Gina Lawre

<sup>12</sup> Of course, the consideration of the seven elements can also enhance the use of NVC dance floors into a NVC transformation practice.

Weisheit ohne Mitgefühl führt zu Angst und

Wilber also puts it, a "map of the internal landscape" (Eros) in order to not get lost in thoughts and experiences. And at the same time it is also important to "apply" this map compassionately (Agape).

In the example with my son, the seven elements have helped me to gain clarity about (Eros) the fact that and how my thoughts trigger my pain in this particular case (I generally already knew this because it is an important basic assumption of the NVC). And they have helped me to develop compassionate understanding (agape) for myself and finally to connect with what I really wanted: to trust that my son will go his way. However, I could only come to this trust after I had solved the pain about my own "addictive tendencies", which were the result of old pain.

At that time I could only do this with compassionate assistance - on the one hand because I was not yet trained and on the other hand because it went very "deep" / "affected" me very strongly, i.e. a great pain was stirred up in me. If a great pain is stirred up in us, i.e. if we feel strong unpleasant feelings, we will probably always need the support of others in order to transform them. I am convinced that even the most compassionate people time and again need friendly and compassionate support themselves. With the people, whom I have met through NVC, I have been able to notice this at least (even with the most experienced ones like Marshall Rosenberg, Robert Gonzales, Miki Kashtan, Klaus Karstädt, ...).

Unfortunately, many have strong resistance against "clarity", "structure", "direction", "leadership" and even against support in general - for good reason. This is understandable because in their past they experienced it as coercion and oppression. This has led many to fear dominance and dependency and both are suspected in leadership respectively in support. It is understandable and at the same time unfortunate because this resistance often prevents using support for self-healing.

Resistance to structure and leadership - because they are often connected with dominance and coercion.

Ken Wilber has described the reason for that resistance very clearly in his book "Eros, Kosmos, Logos", chapter 9 on the basis of the connection between masculine energy (Eros) and feminine energy (Agape):

- 1) **Eros - passion, clarity**, thinking, striving for higher things, embracing the light and
- 2) **Agape - compassion, empathy**, feeling, body, "embracing the lower", "embracing the shadows".

Eros – Leidenschaft und Klarheit  
Agape – Mitgefühl

Many have experienced Eros as dominating and oppressive in the form of rules, structure, discipline, hierarchy, because it was used without the necessary balance of Agape, i.e. without compassion. As Wilber shows, **wisdom (Eros) without compassion (Agape) leads to Phobos, the fear of the shadows, of the lower, of the body, of feelings; to the suppression of the lower, of the body, of feelings** ... The long-term consequences are what so many in our society suffer from: the separation from our feelings and the resulting numbing by the small and big addictions (from chocolate to shopping, work and internet to medication and drugs everything can be used here) ...

Wisdom without compassion leads to fear and suppression

But if we only have Agape without Eros, we fall off the horse on the other side: **Agape without Eros leads to Thanatos. We lose ourselves in feelings, are "afraid of the light", stagnate, resign, we even regress / become the suffering child we once were also** ...

Compassion without wisdom leads to resignation and stagnation

### 3. The balance between wisdom and compassion

Many have already experienced **how healing it is to be supported not only with empathy (Agape) but also with wisdom and direction (Eros)**, for example:

- in the **healing sessions of Marshall Rosenberg**. The wisdom (Eros) lies in the structure of Marshall's role plays, but also in his emphatic answers in the respective role,
- in the support of experienced NVC trainers, if they "lead" (often intuitively),
- working with the **dance floors** of Bridget Belgrave and Gina Lawrie. Here the wisdom also lies in the structure (and some of it is unfortunately often overlooked) and of course also
- in **NVC transformation processes** such as those of Robert Gonzales.

In the latter, wisdom is so clearly expressed that it is difficult to ignore it.

If we look at the connection between wisdom and compassion, it becomes clear that in all the processes listed the procedure has to be accompanied by empathy (= compassion), otherwise it leads to Phobos again and thus to suppression. (Even in the four elements / steps of NVC by the way "Eros" is contained: the four elements and the key distinctions can be regarded as expressions of clarity. And if people react "allergic" to the "GFK expression", this is usually due to the lack of agape/compassion in the "application". NVC then is applied "formally correct", but "mechanically". This application of the NVC as a method, without the inner attitude, i.e. without the "open, non-judgmental, compassionate attitude towards myself and others", leads to Phobos - and accordingly unpleasant it is for the "receiver". ;-)

The balance of clarity and compassion with NVC

**The balance between Eros and Agape is by the way a burning topic of our era** (cf. Ken Wilber, "Eros, Kosmos, Logos", chapter 5): The necessary separation of "thinking" and "body", or on a large scale: of "noosphere" (human mind) and "biosphere" (environment on earth) was exaggerated and led into the separation of spirit/noosphere from body/biosphere and to the suppression of the latter (see below).

The balance of wisdom and compassion globally

#### 4. The integration of body, feeling and thinking

A trivial example: We have learned in our development that we have to sleep when we are exhausted. However, we do not have to sleep immediately, but can postpone sleep with our superior mind (and with it through various means). However, this can go too far and can even lead to extremes. For example, there are time and again reports about people who die of exhaustion (e.g. when playing games on the Internet or in sports): the body signals have been suppressed for too long ...

The separation of mind and body leads to dissociation and suppression; the connection to the body is cut off, i.e. sensations and feelings are no longer felt and the basic because for survival necessary body is thus ignored. The consequences are many civilization diseases and psychosomatic illnesses and there is much to suggest that illnesses are generally caused by a suffering mind (at least in part) ...

Illness as a result of the suppression of feelings and body sensations

But beware: This thesis, even if there is much that supports it, can only work with compassion! Because we are all affected by the in the society deeply rooted guilt thinking, it sounds for someone, who is affected by an illness, too easily like an accusation: "Then I am to blame for my illness? But this completely misses the point, because "guilt" requires at least a free will, and that, as I would like to show in the next chapter, is an illusion.

But first I want to look for ways how we can heal the separation and suppression of body and nature. Ken Wilber's Integral Theory offers a valuable basis for this ...

## The Integral Theory of Ken Wilber

Ken Wilber's Integral Theory shows that everything that exists, and also humankind, has three sides (cf. the three "spheres of value" of Jürgen Habermas and already Immanuel Kant's three critiques):

1: The "true": The external / the observable / the measurable - the domain of empirical science, behavioural psychology and, unfortunately, generally still the largest part of scientific psychology.

2: The "beautiful": The inner experience from sensing to feeling to thinking - the domain of wisdom traditions / mysticism (Gnosis, Sufism, Buddhism ...) and also of Gnosis and psychoanalysis. Behavioural therapy has only integrated the part of thinking and has thus become cognitive behavioural therapy and thus somewhat, but only somewhat more "holistic". It seems to me, by the way, that Tibetan Buddhism is the most highly developed science in this field, i.e. the most highly developed science of inner experience, even though (as Ken Wilber points out) it does not offer any real "shadow work", because it did not yet know the unconscious and thus also not the "shadows" in us<sup>1</sup>.

3: The "good": The interpersonal experience: How do I experience relationships / transferred meaning - the focus of world views and communication. This is the domain of philosophy and theology, among others.

In his Integral Theory Ken Wilber then differentiated the first sphere of value, "the external" even further into two areas: the individual external/observable/measurable, i.e. the brain waves as well as the behavior on the one hand and the interindividual/interpersonal external/observable/measurable, i.e. the social systems and structures on the other hand. Thus Ken Wilber's Integral Theory shows four "quadrants" which are all aspects of the whole. These four quadrants are in humans:

- Upper left (UL) = "individual interior": Everything that can be experienced (phenomenology, meditation, art, individual lines of development, ...)
- Upper right (UR) = "individual exterior": Everything observable/measurable (brain waves, biochemistry, behaviour ...)
- Lower right (LR) = "interindividual exterior": Everything that can be observed, community and system theory, organisational structures (also e.g. sociocracy), social structures ...
- Lower left (LL) = "interindividual interior": Everything communal in relation to the exchange of meanings such as hermeneutics, NVC...

The four quadrants  
of Ken Wilber's  
Integral Theory

These four quadrants are aspects of being human and aspects of every experience and also of every situation as a whole. They are aspects of the "living world", as Jürgen Habermas calls it, and none of these aspects can be reduced to one of the other aspects.

If, as Wilber shows, everything that exists has the described four "quadrants", which are inextricably linked to each other, then all four quadrants have to be taken into account with every illness - and therefore also the "inner individual" (UL) as well as the "interpersonal" (LL). The latter is considered, for example, in the systemic consideration of mental illnesses.

Consequently, all these components must also be taken into account in the healing process. Unfortunately, this still happens far too little in medicine. Even in the case of chronic diseases such as cancer, this resource is generally not used for healing. Miki Kashtan (who herself had cancer) compared e.g. chomitherapy with the fight against terrorism - both overlook the causes and thus the contributions to healing ...

As already mentioned several times, one reason for the fact that the psychological (co-)causes are not respected is certainly the almost always

made false conclusion: "If my psyche is involved in the emergence of my illness, then I am 'to blame myself' for my illness". This false conclusion is based on the belief in "guilt". This belief also leads, for example, to people feeling relieved when they get a diagnosis for their illness, even if this diagnosis says nothing about its causes (which is usual for chronic illnesses). Everything is better than being to blame for one's own suffering ...

## 5. The Existence of "Guilt"

But there are good reasons to say that guilt is an illusion. If there were guilt, it would require at least a conscious decision taken of one's own free will - it would require the ability to do something else than what is done. And this freedom of will is at least questionable (even if most people believe in it).

Arthur Schopenhauers said: "Man may be able to do what he wants, but he cannot want what he wants" - and that is easy to understand. We are essentially influenced by into which family we were born and thus where and how we grew up. We are also formed by our talents and by the way in which they were promoted or not. And we had just as little influence on that as on whom we met while growing up, what experiences we had and what insights life gave us or what we learned in our lives. At some point we seem to be able to want "ourselves ", but what we already learned and experienced in our early childhood still forms the basis for our decisions - and this is usually largely unconscious. If one considers this, one can easily see that our will cannot be free at all and therefore we cannot be guilty in the sense of "consciously evil" or "bad", because every human being is the product and thus also the mirror of the environment into which he was born and in which he grew up.

So one can say so much for sure: we - and above all also the basis for our decisions - are a product of life and therefore the belief in guilt is an illusion! At the same time, however, we must probably believe of ourselves that we have free will in order to be able to experience self-efficacy at all. However it might have become clear that this is an illusion, because our (mostly unconscious) bases of decision do not come "from us". It is therefore a mistake to believe that we could ever do less than "our" best.

The belief in guilt usually also prevents learning from mistakes - or at least makes it more difficult. This is because, on the one hand, we tend to focus on not being guilty rather than on solutions and, on the other hand, we tend to protect ourselves from being guilty and disguise and deny our own contributions to mistakes.

In all that has been said, it is also true that of course we do have a responsibility for what we do. However, in contrast to the common understanding, responsibility here does not mean "to blame", but "to be responsible" in order to really perceive the consequences that our actions had for others, to learn from it and, if necessary, to make reparations.

In the last two millennia many philosophers have already struggled with the question of freedom of will - and there were probably already all positions between pure determinism (everything is predetermined) and pure freedom of will. From this it can be assumed that no answer to this question can be proven. So I may be wrong here too. However, the following question can always serve as orientation for such questions: **"Which view supports my development and that of my fellow human beings best?"**

I believe that the belief in the non-freedom of the will supports personal development best because it frees us from guilt - and thus from a large part of our fear and suffering. It also helps us to remain open to new things and to learn from our mistakes, and thus it also supports living together with others.

Is our will free?

"Guilt" - an illusion that often obscures the truth and prevents healing

The belief in guilt prevents learning from mistakes

A new concept for responsibility

The unprovable belief in the freedom of our will

However, I believe that we are able to slowly gain more freedom for our will. I believe that we can become clear about the reasons for our will, i.e. about our true basis for decision-making, and thus gain influence over it, and ultimately even choose other bases for our decision-making. At the same time we can also open ourselves to the consequences and side effects of our actions and (freed from the burden of the alleged guilt) learn from them for future situations. I believe that through these two points our will can be increasingly liberated. We can, as Immanuel Kant put it somewhat paradoxically: "free ourselves from a self-inflicted immaturity". In my opinion, this also means that we can increasingly act in harmony with ourselves.

A possible liberation of our will ...

Clarifying the basis of our will involves both knowing our beliefs about ourselves, about others, and about the world, and being able to hold and guide our impulses for action<sup>1</sup>. The ability to hold and guide our impulses is particularly important and is also expressed in Kant's definition of "autonomy" (as opposed to heteronomy = "being controlled by others"). Kant said that only those who are able to bind themselves to "self-given maxims" (principles) are autonomous and not heteronomous, i.e. controlled by external stimuli, which ultimately trigger our impulses for action.

... by clarifying our decision bases and by practicing to hold and guide our impulses

Robert Gonzales' transformation practice leads to an inner exploration that can make a helpful contribution towards such autonomy. To grow out of a person who is controlled by more or less unconscious impulses, i.e. who reacts or decides on a more or less unconscious basis to become a truly self-conscious person. To grow into a person who becomes more and more aware of why he thinks, what he thinks, why he feels what he feels and why he does what he does. It leads one to grow into a person whose will becomes more and more free to follow his self-given principles through awareness of his decision bases and through not having to follow his impulses for action.

The NVC transformation practice supports becoming conscious

By the way, this is a topic to which above all the sciences of the inner experience of man, like Tibetan Buddhism, have a lot to say (unfortunately this kind of science is still in its infancy in the West).

## 6. The Integration of Nature and Culture

The tendency to split off and oppress the "body" and the dangers associated with it also exist on a large scale and can be seen in the "civilisation diseases of the biosphere" such as global warming.

### Individual Healing

Wilber shows that this dangerous development (individually as well as globally) cannot be remedied by going "back to childhood" or "back to the Stone Age" (even if we wanted to, we could not "reverse" our minds at all). He shows that this dangerous development can only be healed through integration:

**The basic (and thus vital) body from which the emotional body differentiated in early childhood must be integrated into this more comprehensive (and thus higher) emotional body. This emotional body, from which in turn the mind developed in childhood, must be integrated into the more encompassing mind.**

The integration of body - feelings - thinking

By differentiating especially the mind from the emotional body, the body is prevented from retaining control over us (as it did when we were infants). If integration fails and becomes dissociation, the emotional body and thus the physical body will be ignored, i.e. both emotional and physical needs will be disregarded. If the integration is successful, it means that the mind respects the emotional as well as the physical needs. Through successful integration, the body is integrated into the higher "vision logic" via the emotional, strictly speaking, together with the rational. But this integration is not a static state,

but rather a process that can slide again and again into pathological dissociation.

### The Healing of Humanity

Applied to the entire Earth, this means: **the basic biosphere (vital for us humans) must be integrated into the more comprehensive (because more highly developed) noosphere (the "spirit of humanity")**. The biosphere is the basis and part of the noosphere and as such it must be respected because it is vital for the noosphere and thus for humanity ...

The integration of biosphere and noosphere

Unfortunately it is not guaranteed that this integration will succeed - just as the body / the biosphere and thus the basis of life could be destroyed ... **The good news: Every single person can begin with this integration of body - feeling - thinking within themselves. For this integration we need Agape and Eros, compassion and passion.** The seven elements described above are a help / a map for this integration and as such "Eros" - which must be accompanied by "Agape", i.e. a compassionate / emphatic application is absolutely necessary, otherwise inner resistance arises.

Every person can contribute to this integration at any time by contributing to his own inner integration

The integration of body, feeling and thinking is definitely worthwhile for every person who does it, because it helps to find out why we feel like we feel and why we do or don't do what we do or don't do. This integration is thus the way to "becoming aware of oneself", and it is rewarded with **more relaxation, empowerment and joy of living ...**