



Conscious Life presents

# ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

## Understanding the wisdom of anxiety

Guest: Thomas Hübl

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### **[00:00:10] Alex Howard**

Welcome to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Thomas Hübl.

We're going to be exploring what anxiety is from Thomas's perspective, but also the importance of co-regulation and contact with others as part of the healing process, along with exploring how really anxiety is an intelligence in our system and how to relate to it and respond to it from that perspective.

For those of you who aren't familiar with Thomas, just to give a little bit of his background, Thomas Hübl is a renowned teacher, author, and international facilitator whose lifelong work integrates the core insights of the great wisdom traditions and mysticism with the discoveries of science.

Since the early 2000s, he has been leading large scale events and courses that focus on the healing and integration of trauma. His nonprofit organization, The Pocket Project, works to support the healing of collective trauma throughout the world.

His book, *Healing Collective Trauma*, which I highly recommend, outlines the collective trauma integration process as a safe framework for guiding groups through collective trauma healing.

So welcome, Thomas. It's lovely to see you again. Anxiety is an interesting word. I think it means different things to different people. As you and I were chatting just before we started recording, one of the things you were saying is that when you work with people, really, it's an opening to go deeper into an exploration.

I'd love you to say a bit about when you hear the word anxiety, if you're working one-on-one with someone or someone stands up in a group and says, Thomas, I have this overwhelming anxiety, what does that mean to you? How and where do you explore from there?

### **Thomas Hübl**

First of all, Alex, good to see you again. Happy we are here and in this exploration again.

First of all, there are a few components when we work on anxiety. One is that fear is an emotion, that my own emotional experience resonates with. That's very important because a lot of our anxieties actually come either through our attachment time, through our childhood, like all kinds of difficulties. But the fact that we are dealing with them today means that at that time, we didn't have the right relational support to reflect, digest and integrate the fear into our development.

**[00:03:07]**

So often when I hear in the group's anxiety, usually it's a movie on top of the movie. So that's what's happening now and then there are all kinds of fear about life, and many of those fears have nothing to do with an actual threat. There's no lion coming into the door here, but I'm afraid that maybe one day a lion might come into my office or something will happen to me and somebody will attack me. But I'm not being attacked right now.

So I think the first thing to see is that fear is an emotion of connection. Everybody who has kids knows that when you're a child, like children, they go and explore the world. There's curiosity. But if they go out a bit too far and suddenly a stranger comes by, they come back to us as parents. And we do want that. I want my child to come back to me and not run onto the road.

### **Alex Howard**

So it's a healthy attachment.

### **Thomas Hübl**

Yeah, it's healthy to come back to me when you're scared.

But then that's the part that the child fulfills, but I as a parent need to fulfill also my part, which is... I bring an example that I often use in my groups.

So my child comes in and says, "Daddy, Daddy, I'm scared". And then there are two ways to deal with this, or maybe many, but I use two. I say, "Oh, don't be scared. There is no danger".

So what did I do? My child comes with an emotional request and I give her an intellectual answer. I tell her there is no danger. So I devalued, don't be scared, I devalued her fear and I gave her an intellectual answer when she actually has an emotional request.

The other option is, I turn towards my child and I say, "Yes, I feel you are scared. Come to me". I take her on my lap or embrace her or hold her hand. I create somebody contact. I say, "Okay, I feel that you are scared". So I create emotional resonance. My nervous system resonates deeply with hers. She feels that is comfort and safety. It down regulates her stress. It down regulates her anxiety. It switches her anxiety into curiosity. Her brain state changes.

And then I say, "Okay, let's have a look what happened". So then I bring rational leadership into a more regulated situation. That's, I believe, a more skillful and elegant way to deal with the same situation.

So now from, don't be scared, which is still in a relation, to a child that comes back home but there is nobody, the parents are either also dangerous for the child or not available, working all the time, whatever is the reason. Or so traumatized themselves that they don't feel the child so there's no emotional resonance actually happening. So the child stays with the fear, him or herself.

So when somebody gets up in my group, there is fear, the age that the person feels the level of the fear that the person voices has an age, a developmental age. That's important for me. And the fear lives usually in a preformed relational environment.

**[00:06:46]**

So I start to hold my fear. So many people I meet in groups, we are used to holding stress and fear inside, and that became a chronic state that I don't even question anymore because it became so much part of my sense of self.

So of course there are thousands of variations of what I said. Now that's very simplified what I'm saying now. Just to finish it. And then that holding is a preformed relational space. Often when people talk about fear, they actually leave their relation. So they feel alone.

And I think all the conversation around fear that we're going to have, I think it's very important to include these three aspects that I mentioned right now because they are crucial for any kind of treatment.

### **Alex Howard**

In a sense, part of the essence of what you're saying, which I think is really helpful and important, is that much of the anxiety that we experience in our lives now is not actually what's happening now.

To put it slightly differently, that there may be an activation that happens in our system because maybe there's a shock in the environment or there's something that requires us to up regulate our nervous system, but that becoming a state of anxiety is actually a learned response from an absence of regulation, in a sense.

### **Thomas Hübl**

And so that the relational dimension in any kind of healing process of anxiety is super important. Because when we look at trauma, what is trauma? When a traumatic impact happens, there are three things that happen.

One is that the system goes into high stress so there's an exaggeration of stress and hyperactivation, as we call it. Then there is a fragmentation. So trauma is being created, and there is a numbing. We are shutting down something. So from that time we live in, the energy that gets shut down becomes the past. It's a hostage in space time. It gets frozen somewhere in time. At the age where the traumatization happened, that is the past.

And then we need a future to integrate that past back into present. So we start living. We can't live anymore fully here. And so sometimes I say, okay, just simply sit and enjoy. So sit, enjoy the sitting, the breathing, the sensing, the listening. And for many people, after 10 seconds, half a minute, a minute, maybe I didn't do this. Maybe I should have written this email. Maybe this or fears come up or whatever, like something starts to come up when we do that.

So it's actually not so easy to just sit and enjoy. Even if it sounds very easy, but often stuff starts to come out or come up. And that's a sign that there is stored stress.

So there is the level of fear when somebody comes with anxiety or panic attacks or fear disorders, there's a certain amount of fear that we feel, but there is a much deeper, that's usually just the tip of the iceberg. Underneath there's a much bigger system of fear. And the splitting off that overwhelming fear creates often the assumption that the fear is something that we want to get rid of.

**[00:10:36]**

I think not many people maybe would say, I want to get rid of my liver. And it's very clear that we don't. Why would we? It's part of my body. But we don't experience the fear anymore. It looks like something that's bothering me, something that's limiting me, something that I want to get rid of to really live my life, but it's the same. So I think that's part of the gridlock that some people fill themselves in, and that's a hard place to be in.

### **Alex Howard**

I think so because I think often what we need, as you're speaking to, when we have anxiety, is to come closer to ourselves and to come into the body, into the moment. But that's often where those stored traumas, those difficult emotions, those places are.

Almost the closer we come to ourselves. It's almost like jumping on a trampoline, as people come down they bounce away from themselves to escape those places. But then it's almost like we try to then think our way to the feeling of safety we're trying to get. Like if I strategize or I work the story in my head that somehow that place of safety I'm going to find is going to be in our mind, but it seems to just perpetuate the cycle.

### **Thomas Hübl**

So then we see this one symptom is over rationalization, disembodiment, tensions, all kinds of stuff that are symptomatic, but they are not the real thing, they are symptoms.

But I think that's very important. So we over rationalize, we over plan, we over control, but actually what we're saying is, I'm scared. Because sometimes coming back to myself is in itself very good, but it's not as easy as it sounds, as you said. So that's why there are certain things we can do around fear that we can do in our own practice.

To have a practice is good, but a lot of the work, I think, is relational work because most of the missing co-regulation, most of the hurt, most of the abuse, most of the neglect that happened in our lives is a relational thing. And it happens also in our nervous systems, in the relational part of our nervous system.

And that's why when we have people that are really with us, and when I say I'm scared and you hear that I'm scared and you can feel me being scared, that really creates a sense of safety.

### **Alex Howard**

But often one of the real barriers to that is there is so much cultural shame and ideas around vulnerability.

It's funny, I was watching the other night, I don't know if you've seen there's a documentary on the band Metallica called *Some Kind of Monster*, which is about the making of an album called *St. Anger* they made about 20 years ago. But it's a very raw documentary that shows... A heavy metal band is seen as being like ultra alpha male, like super strong. And they're just sort of being filmed falling apart kind of mess.

**[00:14:01]**

It's interesting, apparently a number of artists after that said it really helped them talk about their own vulnerabilities. And it somewhat penetrated the idea that one has to always, as a performer, be seen as being slick and perfect and the idealized image of that.

But it really made me think about these cultural ideas we have around vulnerability and anxiety and fear. And what you're saying is, in a sense part of the healing happens in relationship, but part of the obstacle to that relationship is the shame and the beliefs we have around what it means to show those places.

### **Thomas Hübl**

That's again an after effect of not having that kind of nourishment at the beginning of our life. Because people that have that and people that feel, oh, whenever I was scared I had support from my parents, my grandparents, my teachers. When people feel oh, being emotional and vulnerable is actually my natural state and I am afraid somebody listens to me and figures out something with me.

And then people grew up, like my emotional experience is a natural part of myself, like my liver or my heart. It's a part of me. It's not something external that bothers me. But once it's split off, once it's dissociated, so then it looks like something that's happening to me that I can get rid of.

But often when we want to get rid of emotions, we are replaying something that happened many years ago already. So I want to get rid of that and I'm replaying that. I already got rid of that fear. I try to get rid of that fear by dissociating it.

It's a bit similar to I often say, like many people say, I still have that pattern. And then I say, what do you mean still? I say, I'm working on this already so long and I still have the pattern. But what does still mean? Because still means that it shouldn't be there. As if there is an issue with me having that pattern.

So still is exactly the pandemic trauma symptom of postponing experience. So I want to be more developed than I am, but it's a sign that I cannot be here. Because if I'm here, then that's part of me and I'm doing whatever I can do to illuminate myself more. But it's not that I still have it, because by still I'm saying I don't want it. Instead saying, yeah, that's part of me. Sometimes I am afraid. Sometimes I'm scared to make decisions, sometimes I'm afraid of X-Y-Z. That's me.

But that is already a certain level of development that we can own our fear. So coming back to your original question, I think when fear comes up, offering the right relation that there is an invitation to come more in touch with it and see that there is a capacity to transform fear into aliveness, curiosity, into more grounding, more soil. I think we can talk about that more.

### **Alex Howard**

I want to come to that in a second, but I think before we do, I think it's also worth saying that often the stories we have are, because I have this anxiety it means therefore I'm going to be rejected, or it means I can't do this thing that in my heart I want to do, or it means that I'm going to fail in my career, whatever it may be.

**[00:17:54]**

And I think what's also important in what you're saying is that, that fear of that anxiety may be part of someone's day-to-day experience for a time, but it doesn't mean all those stories and all those ideas that we may have about it.

### **Thomas Hübl**

And more than that, all those stories and ideas are actually ways to disconnect from the emotional intensity and go to a rational story.

And even if sometimes we think, oh, it's true, because I'm scared, I'm not getting promoted in my job or I'm not getting this, I'm not getting the life partner that I want because I'm scared to reach out, of course there is also some truth in the behavior, but the underlying thing is that it's much easier to go to a storyline in my thoughts than to stay with the experience of the emotion.

And when fear is too strong, we need somebody to be with us, and we need to learn how to titrate, like do it in portions, not to get flooded and overwhelmed, then nothing's anyway happening so I'm just staying in the fear and I'm scared. But if I have the right guidance, how to transform fear into groundedness, fear, into curiosity, fear into instability.

And I can notice how there is my body, there are my emotions, my thoughts, usually, like in our integrated self, they are supposed to be one flow. That thinking emotions and body sensations of one expression. But where we are hurt, it's not like that. That's why often we shut down the fear and we overthink.

And I notice, I'm thinking a lot what might happen, but actually I'm afraid that it might happen. But that's okay. I can be afraid that it might happen. But what often happens then is things happen in our life and then our mind says, you see, I knew it. And then the pattern confirms itself. And then we think, you see, it was right.

### **Alex Howard**

It's like an anxiety confirmation bias.

### **Thomas Hübl**

Yeah, a confirmation bias. But if I don't recognize that I'm doing that, then I really believe it's true because I'm scared things are happening, and then this confirms itself.

And that's a vicious cycle. There's no way out. Except if somebody helps us to dismantle that cycle and say, okay, you're scared. Some people when they feel, oh, it's going great in my job, fear comes up that something else will fall apart, what will happen. And I notice, I'm becoming more successful here and I'm getting scared. So this brings up fear in me.

And I learn ways how to be with the fear on the level of the emotion. And if I need then I bring somebody else into my life, like a therapist or some friends or some relational support where I can exchange when I'm afraid and I can learn to co-regulate fear, to ground myself in the fear and see, wow, it's an emotion. It's okay.

**[00:21:02]**

And often it comes with stress. So it comes with an energy that goes up and takes us naturally into thinking and action. In dangerous situations we need that, but often there's no dangerous situation but we have the same fight, flight, impulse.

And I learned to regulate my nervous system. I see I'm getting stressed. I can feel the sensations of stress in my body. I breathe slower, I down regulate my stress. I feel my body again, more. And then I say, yes, I'm scared. And I bring more attention to my fear. And I learn to stay with my fear for maybe 5 seconds, 10 seconds, until I can more and more ground myself in my fear and transform it into free energy.

### **Alex Howard**

I think that piece there is really important. It's a change in orientation. That actually, rather than trying to get away from fear, what we are actually doing is turning our attention towards the fear.

What helps support people in doing that? We've talked about a few pieces already and the importance of co-regulation, the importance of practices. Maybe, where do people start with that? If someone is recognizing that their orientation is away or it's towards action or it's towards thinking, what helps that initial change in attention in your experience?

### **Thomas Hübl**

So first of all, for many people, it's very good to notice we're all sitting in the same boat. Sometimes I ask in my groups, and there are hundreds and sometimes thousand people, and I ask, okay, who knows that too? And then you see hundreds of hands go up.

And so sometimes the story in our isolation is, oh, it's only me. I'm having all these fears. All the other people, they are all great. It's just me. And then you see, wait a moment, we all have fears. Some people know to hide it better, some people can't hide it that well, but we're all in the same boat. So it's human to be afraid.

The second thing is that I notice, oh, my tendency is to isolate myself and I need support. I need to speak sometimes, I need friends, I need a therapist. I need to reach out. And that's actually responsible. It's able to respond to my fears is pulling the right resources into my life that I need, which for some people is not that easy, but that's what we need.

And then the other thing is to see, when children come back to their parents, fear is an emotion of connection. Fear is not a mistake. Fear is an intelligent function that helped us over hundreds of thousands of years to survive better. It has its functions. And if it's not integrated well in our development, it bothers us in our lives later. So there are side effects.

But if we see, because some people say the fear is like separation. No, fear is bringing kids back to their parents in order to co-regulate and feel safe. If that didn't work, well, we learn to hold our fear. Because some people frame it like, oh, my fear blocks me. And I would say, we block our fear. And that's the difference.

I often say, I'm sitting on the board of amnesty emotions because we often blame our emotions and we have lawyers for every emotion.

**[00:24:38] Alex Howard**

That's very funny.

**Thomas Hübl**

So we learned to hold our fear because we didn't have anybody to co-regulate it with. But once I see this, wow, I was actually super intelligent to hold my own fear because that's what was the best I could do. It's not that that's a problem, I'm too stupid to do things, I'm not something. No, I was intelligent. I learned to hold myself.

That has side effects when I'm grown up, because I can't relax into an intimate relationship or into my job or into life in general. I don't feel the flow of life anymore that I can trust. Of course, there are many symptoms that we suffer from, but everything we encounter in ourselves is intelligence that we often don't understand.

I often say, for example, when a child comes into a hospital at age 5 months and it's being left alone because parents aren't allowed to be around a child, so there's a strong attachment trauma. And that is an existential crisis for the child, and it's very fearful. So the child shuts down the body in order to not feel the fear.

So later on, that person might have panic attacks. But in the hospital, not feeling my body was the best I could do for myself. And just to honor what seems like the biggest problem, because it seems like everybody else can meditate and feel their body, I go to meditation retreats and I don't feel anything. That, 'I don't feel anything' seems like a problem, but it was actually my childhood hero or heroin.

It's an intelligent function that at that level, at 5 months old, it was a process. Ever since it's a symptom. The echo of the process is a symptom in every other level of development.

So when a grownup person is supposed to be a CEO of a company, has fear and panic attacks to take important decisions, and then comes to sessions, then say, okay, but what you're looking at is not dysfunctional, it's functional at 5 months old. It looks dysfunctional ever since.

And once I get that, I reframe entirely my own inner process. I'm not looking anymore at what doesn't work, I'm looking always at things that work, but maybe I'm not living in the appropriate time zone. But that's a different approach to my whole inner process.

And the other part is that that person, for example, his fear lives at that level. There might be another client that comes to me that says, oh, I also have panic attacks, but that person was bullied at school at age 12.

So what we train a lot in our work is to be able to track through our own nervous system in our clients, when somebody says fear, for me this is very unspecific because fear is a whole emotional color spectrum. And I need to find the right fear and then model in a way or modulate my own nervous system to become the environment that a 5 month old baby needed or that a 12 year old child needs. That's a different treatment.

And so the fluidity of a practitioner's nervous system is key to be able to address the right level of fear within the right level of age and process, because that, I believe, is the highway. That's why I often say



precise relation is love. Precision is love. Because if I listen to you and I listen to you specifically, you will feel really seen and felt. And that's what we are all craving for.

**[00:28:50]**

And often it seems like we need a permission that we can reach out because we are so used to holding it in. So sometimes we need to hear that more often that looking for support in those situations is a very responsible thing to do.

**Alex Howard**

I think one of the things that often is difficult is if our experience as children was that when we instinctively reached for that holding, and as you described earlier, perhaps we were met by either an intellectualization or just rejection of what we're feeling, we have a lot of learned habits to push away. And it was A, to push away, but B, to not ask for the support and holding that we need. And as we've talked about, this just perpetuates the whole cycle of fear and anxiety.

Is your experience that mostly the awareness of that is enough? Or do you find that sometimes people need more than just to recognize the pattern to be able to change that cycle?

**Thomas Hübl**

No. I think the awareness, of course, is important, but often that's not enough. Sometimes we really need the guidance, and sometimes even looking for the guidance is the most scary thing. Looking for the support, as you said, is very scary. If relationships were either painful, disorganizing, not steady, then reaching out feels like one of the biggest fears I have.

And we need to, of course that's a very important point that needs to be taken into account. And still the first step is that I raise my own awareness that I'm avoiding that actually. Which means I'm avoiding my fear of reaching out. I'm not avoiding the reaching out. I'm avoiding the fear that will come up when I reach out.

So that I can notice, I'm actually scared to reach out. And then maybe I can create a deeper holding from a fear. Yes, I'm scared and I still will be able to reach out, even if that scares me.

The other part is that I think the more we can also work on the cultural reframing that that's actually not a sign of weakness, but that's a sign of strength. And it's not that it threatens my belonging, it actually strengthens my belonging.

Because once relationship was scary, we have all kinds of intellectual frameworks in ourselves why it's good the way we do it and why the other version is not that good. And one of them might be that we show weakness, that if we lose our belonging, people won't love us anymore. We show that we are dysfunctional.

And then more and more we create a cultural framework, especially first, all the people that are raised to have enough awareness that we see everything that we want to examine in ourselves is intelligence at work, even if I don't understand it, and even if it looks dysfunctional.

And then we will learn tools of how to listen to ourselves, often with support in a different way, that we can re-own that intelligence and today transform it into something new.

**[00:32:21]**

When we look at trauma, trauma, which is the base of many fears, is an un-updatable area that is frozen somewhere in time. It's like an app on your phone. Even if you update all the other apps, that app never gets updated. So after a few years, you can't use it. That's why when we say, we have a regressive moment or a trigger moment, we respond like at that time. It's like it's an app that never got an update.

But many parts of us get updated. We grow, we are creative, we develop. I mean, just you, how you develop your work over the years, you feel creative, you feel inspired, you have new ideas. You bring, for example, this summit, which I think is very important because it creates a different public ecosystem around fear. So that fear becomes something we are interested in, not something we want to get rid of.

And when we carry trauma inside, then relationships and corrective relationships, even if at first they are scary, are exactly the part that can help us to update the places inside where we got frozen and where we are holding a lot of fear, for example.

And then once that opens up and melts, the fear melts. It's not that we can fall back into it. Once it really integrates, the past disappears because the past, and the future that was needed to heal it, become present. And once we are present, we are here.

So those movies from the past, 'I need to make a decision, I'm afraid'... You know how we perpetuate culturally fears is when people say, oh, I have to take an exam at the University, and I'm really scared. Most of the people would say, yes, I was also scared.

But actually, we are confirming in each other, like a pattern, because I'm not scared because of the exam, I'm scared of my past. Maybe past exams, school experiences, being treated, parents wanted me to always be successful, so I was always scared to lose love. So all that speaks when I say, I'm scared to take that exam. It's not that I'm scared right now in most of the cases.

So we also culturally built a cultural ecosystem that is sometimes based on the frozenness of fear, where we reinforce those narratives in each other. There's also a lot of unconscious cultural processes that are built on that.

### **Alex Howard**

There's lots of places I want to go and I'm mindful of time, but there's one thing I particularly wanted to ask you about as well, which is, how existential fear or when one does deep spiritual work or deep inquiry work, sometimes when we go to those deeper places in ourselves, maybe it's the same fear in a pure way, maybe it's something that's perhaps a bit different, but it's almost like we have all these ideas of who we are which give us this sense of safety and personality and constructs.

And the more we break free of that somehow, sometimes on the pathway towards a deeper sense of connection, sometimes there can be some very difficult places that we can navigate through.

And I was curious as to what you see as being most important in helping people move through those places?

## [00:36:03] Thomas Hübl

First of all, we can say that the younger fears are, and sometimes also in spiritual processes we hit very fundamental fears, the younger they are, more of it is included, which means they are more existential. It's all my life.

Sometimes you hear people when they go through divorce and they say, my whole life is falling apart. But that's a very existential fear that has nothing to do with the divorce, but it's being triggered by the divorce and is a very existential threat that the person experiences because suddenly everything is threatened.

That's not how an integrated nervous system or integrated person will experience divorce. It's painful, it's emotional, it's many processes, and we need time to separate, but it won't be an existential crisis in my life. It's going to be an emotional experience and maybe a deep one, but it's not an existential crisis.

The same is also true for the spiritual practice. The spiritual practice in itself is not an existential crisis, but the places... So when we say, more spiritual awakening means that more light, which means more conscious awareness, embodied conscious awareness.

So there are two forms of light. One is embodied light, like my conscious awareness through my body. One is potential light. That's basically our higher consciousness future. Potential is what we download through our life and bring it into the world.

So when there's more light coming in, more awareness through meditation, contemplation, mindfulness practices, yoga, Tai Chi, all kinds of prayers and meditations, I increase my awareness. Of course, all the unrecognized trauma layers in my nervous system and body will show up because I become aware of them, because I have more awareness.

And so when I turn that constant, when I don't see that as a problem but I know that that's part of my past, every time that happens, which feels sometimes like a disruption, stuff in my life is not as I am used to, so it gets disturbed, that's great. Why? Because there's stuff there to disturb me. So it's great that I become aware of it.

So I'll integrate this. And if I need some help or some guidance, that takes me deeper into my presence or into presence, embodied presence. So I ground light more and more, but the earlier I come, sometimes we hit fears that are really scary, like existentially scary. But that's just the beginning.

The next level that I think we should also talk about is, and we go now through the spiritual into this dimension, is, but it didn't start with us. So when I sometimes have fears, it might be that my grandparents, for example, experienced the Second World War. That's a huge trauma. They were in cities that have been bombed. They experienced violence and the war.

So when I am two generations later, I needed to, and still need when it comes up, look at those layers that are connected to my ancestral traumatization, to the lineage.

And then not only that, that my ancestral layers, there is trauma there, but then there's the whole cultural framework that I have been born into, which was Austria in the beginning of the 70s, 35 years after the war. And so there was a whole layer of numbness, silence and all these stories from the Second World War created an ecosystem that I grew up in. There was a lot of fear in the collective

field. There was the Holocaust that happened, one of the biggest catastrophes of humanity and all that created a huge field of fear.

### **[00:40:27]**

So often we think about fear as a personal issue, which is also true on one level, but not only because we are growing up. The individual and the collective in my understanding, are an interconnected unity. So I am individual, but I am also collective. I'm also ancestral. I have an individual nervous system, an ancestral nervous system, a collective nervous system.

And so sometimes when we deal with anxieties, it's like a sandwich of layers. So when we go through spiritual awakenings, we not only go through our own individual stuff, but we also go through more.

And I think that's a complex process, especially for us living in society and not living there. Even there it's happening, but if we live in a cave in the Tibetan mountains or somewhere where we are practicing a little bit of a different spiritual practice.

But here in society, it's very important that we become more embodied otherwise our spirituality takes us a bit out of life, and it actually is supposed to become a resource to meet our challenges more. That spirituality, for example, becomes a way how we meet the war in Ukraine, how we meet refugees, how we meet climate change, how we meet post colonialism, how we meet racism in a different way and not just try to stay clean of all of that and just keep our peace.

And I think then what you said is very important, because sometimes when the discomfort comes up in the spiritual practice, people stop practicing. Instead of, this is my prayer, this is my life, and I will meet it step by step as I can with the support that I can get. But I keep on going, and I will step by step integrate the stuff that shows up on my way because it is my way.

### **Alex Howard**

What also strikes me is what you were saying earlier about there's intelligence in anxiety. And it's almost like the quieter one becomes in their inner space, the more perhaps they're able to hear some of the things that are not okay in the world around us.

And to be bothered by that and to be disturbed by that somehow is a healthy response. It's not something to non-attached from or to bypass away from.

### **Thomas Hübl**

And then our emotional capacity to resonate with shame, with anger, with sadness, with fear, with love, with joy, and with numbness. So the more I feel at home in my own emotional experience, then I can resonate with. And then many questions are not mental moral questions. Then they are questions of whole body resonance.

And then I feel where I need to engage, where I don't need to engage, what's my mission in life? What's not my mission in life? What are the things that are ethically not okay, and how to respond to that? Because often those become merely intellectual questions, but they're actually whole body questions. They're not just philosophy. They are responsiveness.

And I think becoming more responsive also affects the way we are parents, affects the way we are colleagues, affects the way we take care of nature around us and climate change and many pressing

issues. They are not disturbances. That's our mission. That's our life. We are here to deal with that stuff. Why? Because we're alive now. We're not living in the middle age, so we are living now.

**[00:44:22]**

So it's not like, oh God, we have climate change, oh, we have this, as if life should be without all of that. But my emotional integration and my capacity, because if I deal with my own fears, I can be in a very different way with your fears or with anybody's fears, and you with mine. So we also become much more skilled in being supportive of each other and support in each other's lives.

And I'm less bound to feel comfortable that I live a life that there's no intrusion of any discomfort because I want this, but then my life is also that small. Instead of, I learned to live fully. And if they are challenging situations, we will take care of the challenge. And if there are pleasant situations, we will be with the pleasant part of life.

But it's not that the one is better than the other. All of this is life, and I'm here to live it. That's why we are here. We are here to be in this experience. And that's why I think your summit is very important, because I think fear is often, either becomes the experience limitation or the transformed fear becomes a deep passion to engage.

Because we feel more free in life, that we are not anymore afraid of challenges. We are with challenges because we integrated past fears so we have a bigger radius to move, to be creative. And then even if we get afraid, we have a higher capacity to be with the fear and say, yes, I'm also scared sometimes, and I'm in it.

And I think that's beautiful. That's why I think your summit is so important, because fear is such a big topic. And if we can make it a public conversation, if you can have spaces where there's a warm environment to be with fears, I think that's deeply healing.

**Alex Howard**

Thank you, Thomas. I mindful we're out of time, but for people that want to find out more about you and your work, I want to recommend your book, *Healing Collective Trauma*, but maybe just say a little bit about, obviously your [website](#) will be linked with the interview, but where people can go, what they can find and some of what might be a useful next step in your work from what we're talking about.

**Thomas Hübl**

I want to just underline a few things we said first, if that's possible?

**Alex Howard**

Please.

**Thomas Hübl**

That the spiritual resource can be a very strong resource. It can also be an escape, but it can be a resource. The relational I mentioned can be a very strong resource. Some practices of embodiment can be a very strong resource.

**[00:47:16]**

So there are a lot of resources available that we naturally have. And I think especially for fear, like relating is the remedy. And the good news is that we all have some of that remedy in us. So I think if we train it, like as humanity, we can be really good in supporting each other.

And that also means that sometimes we are scared, but sometimes also the way we are with somebody that is scared makes such a difference for that person.

So we talked a lot about how it is to be afraid and how we deal with our own fears, but it's equally important what space we can provide for other people that are scared right now. And every one of us has good moments where we can be generous. And I think sometimes, not to give advice, you should do this, you should do that, just to listen to somebody and say, yes, I feel with you. I'm here for you. I can feel you're scared. I feel you're stressed.

Or in organizations or companies when somebody is really distressed to take 5 minutes and say, I really listen to you. I don't need to give you advice. I'm just with you. Like these moments, I think we all know how that feels when somebody is there for us. And that dimension of relational support, I think, makes a huge difference.

### **Alex Howard**

I think often our desire to offer advice or fix is often our own discomfort. It's just being with someone in that place.

### **Thomas Hübl**

Exactly. That's exactly the point. So that we learn also by providing a space, we are actually deepening our own capacity to be with fear and not to go on top of it, into intellectualizing. So that's beautiful.

And the other thing is that I think that we see isolation and interconnectedness and how they interplay between them. Because trauma suggests a lot of separation. And relational capacities, presencing, community work, like being in community, is actually the remedy for that. And that we see that an individual is not separate, but an individual is a specific expression of the whole.

So we are always life. If we are scared, we are life. If we are happy, we are lives, but we are always life because we belong to the tradition of living. And I think that's also important. Sometimes we feel very separate and we are still living and we are still connected to the spark of life that motivates us.

Our resources, I think there are multiple. There is, of course, our main [website](#), and then there's our Collective Trauma Summit, like your summit, which is a great inspiration for people that want to learn more about more large scale wounds and large scale responsiveness to current world situations.

And then I think there is our NGO, The Pocket Project, which is an international NGO that deals with collective trauma around the world. And many of our training programs on our [website](#), everybody can find everything.

And one more thing that I thought about now is also, I think in our time when we talk about fears, that the way we use technology, I think is a very important part related to fears, because on the one hand,

trauma often or fears might create an addictive behavior to the use of technology, and it might overexpose us to the trauma that's being circulated on social media.

**[00:51:17]**

Sometimes media, actually... That's why we often say more clicks doesn't mean necessarily more public health. Often sensational media users...

**Alex Howard**

It's designed to provoke a response.

**Thomas Hübl**

Yeah, to provoke our hyperactivation response or provokes more numbness. So it definitely contributes to the polarization in the society.

And I think when we talk about fear, since we are in such a tech ecosystem, I think we need to be mindful of how we use technology, what reinforces our fears inside. Sometimes how we shut ourselves off and we don't want to hear anything that's one extreme. But the other extreme is also to be hooked into the Internet all the time and be overloaded and then it increases our fear levels and I think that's happening nowadays for many people.

So to find a regulated way in the use of tech. And maybe the last thing when we talk about fear in our time is that the buffer zones of our ecosystem are being filled up. That means the stress buffer of the biosphere is full.

And I think many of us consciously or unconsciously start feeling that. And one level of collective fears might be because we are already feeling that there's a large-scale change process happening on our planet that is scary, can be potentially more scary and will create a lot of change on this planet.

And I think that's already palpable consciously or unconsciously in us. So some of the fear disorders or some of the fear that we suffer from might be also fueled by a collective situation that we have to face. And that's why it's even more important to come together because we are also dealing with a collective issue that we need to deal with as a collective and not as separate islands.

And that's, again, why I think your summit is very important that we create an ecosystem of being together and collaborating, as we do already for some years. And I think those networks are highly important at the moment because that's part of the remedy to go through some more rough waters together.

**Alex Howard**

Beautiful. Thank you, Thomas. I really appreciate you and I really appreciate you sharing wisdom here. Thank you so much.

**Thomas Hübl**

Thank you.