Introduction and Guest Background

This is doctor talks. Real talk from real doctors. Only issues that matter to you most. My guest today is Thomas Huebel, and he has a new book called attuned.

Thomas Hubel is an international speaker and teacher. His work integrates modern science with the insights. If you know that he has great wisdom traditions.

He teaches workshops, online courses and live events in the US and Europe. Thomas, it's a pleasure to have you here. Well, thank you so much for having me.

I'm curious, where are we going to go with this conversation? So having me, we're going to go to all kinds of places, probably plumb the deaths and also explore the heights. So.

Right, exactly. I'd like to just, have you give us just a very brief sense of your history and how you got to be where you are. And then I want to move into your mystical experiences and also the whole focus of your new book, attuned.

So let's start with just a brief introduction to your personal story. So my personal story, I think is a little bit unconventional in the sense that, I already when I was 16, I joined the Red cross as a volunteer and I, became a paramedic and later a trainer for paramedics.

And I started to study medicine in Vienna. Then with 26, I left my medical studies. I went on a four year meditation retreat. I, had very deep, very deep time during that time.

And this for years. And then and then after this four years, I got invitations to do workshops and person with life experience. So I did that. And then I traveled around the world and and then over in the first years of my, teaching time, like I came across, but then I studied for 20 years is collective trauma, trauma and collective trauma. And wisdom, traditions and spiritual development.

And so that that then became the stream of my work and, all the other things arose from that. And, yeah. So that's a short, short version. I want to rewind to one moment there, 26 years old and going out of horror Year retreat.

That's obviously, you know what every 26 year old plans to do? They just say, oh, I'm going to go in for you for your meditation retreat. That's a really remarkable juncture.

I mean, something, enormously catalytic must have happened to prompt that kind of radical departure from a conventional path. That's true. It's like, I felt it.

I started to meditate when I was 19, and. And I, when I was 26, I felt like a need. I didn't know that it's going to be four years and turned out to be four years later than.

But a a I felt the need to go deeply inside to also detox a part of myself. From what I've learned and what I've been conditioned by. And, and and then I And to find a deeper place in myself to.

And I felt all the time it's needed to bring what I have to bring to the world. I need that kind of learning. And I often said to people, I'm studying, but I'm studying in a different way.

Detoxing Conditioning Through Meditation

And like, it's a it's an inner studying. And they and it was very powerful. And for me. But yeah, very meaningful time. So it was absolutely the right thing to do.

But it wasn't always easy because I love science and I love, you know, I love, also contributing to the world. I was a volunteer for nine years, at the Red cross, and I loved it.

And I love being active in society, so but it was a very important time, and I think it taught me a lot today that I'm passing on today. Well, I love that phrase, use detox.

Detox from my conditioning. I needed to detox my conditioning, and most people don't even realize they are conditioned. They don't realize they're just on a hamster wheel.

They are living this life in which there are expectations made of them. They're raised a certain way and, I met one one, one physician friend of mine said, my, in my family, there was we had a choice.

We could go into various careers. A doctor or a lawyer. And that was that was that was the choice she experienced in her her upbringing. Just follow the, the script blindly for decades until she hit a wall, got very sick and dropped out.

And so, many of us will have a crisis. Don't even realize we're we're conditioned and we're following that conditioning faithfully, sometimes our whole lives.

Shankara says that many people just, begin their life that way unconsciously and their life unconsciously, and a very few moments of consciousness in between.

So, that idea that we would actually pause, stop, go away and consciously let all the stuff shift is a is a powerful, powerful, powerful idea. And if not, if people take nothing away from this interview other than the idea that you can do that and it's necessary to do it at a certain point, I think we'll have done them a service.

Yeah. Yeah, I completely agree. I had as I said, I was already when I was 19, I felt the need to do this. I engaged in body psychotherapy, I did a lot of other things.

So I always felt the urge were very young already on I felt did I, that I need to bring more attention to how I've been conditioned the unconscious parts of myself to purge parts of myself?

So that felt like always like a big urge. And then of course, the more I matured and the more I also then the experiences of these four years, plus my work, then gave me more and more language to formulate some of these principles of the work that that I'm also teaching now globally.

And, and I think that that, all of this together, I see is, is a very important detox process to, to also see the world more clearly and not just see the world through the filters that we are trained to put on or that we needed to develop in order to go through difficult experiences ourselves.

Yeah. So I think that's the that was always a strong motivation in me. Yeah. And we don't know where to lead initially. And then we have to just move along with that impulse and trust.

And then when that that movement occurs, we then do move to, to new heights, realization and csl's from, a different perspective. And you have focus particularly on the area of trauma, and also not just individual trauma, but also collective trauma.

The whole idea that we're living this collectively traumatized, life. And, you know, trauma is often thought to be, as being the, the body's response, the nerve systems response to a life threatening event or a perceived life threatening event.

And, that produces remarkable shifts in, in neurophysiology, people who with PTSD, for example, have dramatically shorter lifespans. They have traumatic compromised health, have more cancer, they have more heart disease, produces all of these, these issues.

And the adverse childhood experiences study done in the 1990s showed us that people with adverse childhood experiences, unhealed childhood trauma, have greater amounts of disease in their 50s as adults.

And it's scales, the more trauma as a child, the greater the disease burden. 50 years later, it doesn't heal spontaneously. We have to do something about it.

We have to consider your approach, our healing. And so that's, a powerful beginning and, one that that is sometimes also interwoven with growth. People can also experience post-traumatic growth as well as post-traumatic stress.

So, how do we nudge ourselves in the direction of using whatever adverse experiences we've had for that process, a reflection of detoxing rather than just going along with that and being programed by our traumas?

Trauma, Health, and Collective Wounds

Yeah, I think first of all, for as you said already, I think for for some of us, to the suffering and the consequences of the trauma, symptoms in health, relationships, workplaces, society, our driving factors, so the suffering becomes the motivation for some of us.

And also, I think, an increasing level of understanding of many of the things that you just mentioned, like what science tells us already about trauma is and how it's inherently connected to health, for example, that there is an increasing number in our population that is aware of that and says, okay, we actually need to do something before all these symptoms manifest, and we can do something and we develop more and more and modalities that are really having an impact and changing in a way, the way our, life can go.

And I have seen thousands of people really change their life by engaging the work, a deeper work. And and that we know, like when we integrate trauma, we create more creativity, we are more grounded.

We feel more regulated and related. We feel more engaged. We feel less, you know, disconnected or triggered all the time. And so there are many, many positive effects to to the integration of trauma.

And then because my work started also in Europe and in the German speaking, like Germany, Austria, Switzerland, it's like I have seen in the, in many of my workshops because they grow pretty fast.

The groups became big, big, very fast. And, and a lot of groups that I led brought up the collective dimension, the Second World War, the Holocaust, and then we we expanded.

Then I started to study this because it happened all the time. It came up all the time. So we deepened this, and we created a lot of work between Jewish people from around the world, from Israel.

Holocaust survivor families and and people from Germany and, and even Nazi descendants. And we had very deep work being done and through like doing this for many years, I learned a lot about the collective trauma dynamics and to understand that we have been born into a world that was already hurt when we came.

And sometimes we forget that because we look at trauma as individual. What happened to me and my attachment and what happened to me through difficult experiences, but that our ancestors were hurt and we have more and more epigenetic evidence that how trauma gets encoded in our epigenome, which which activates our genes and and that that following generations express trauma symptoms even without having a strong traumatic experience in their in their life, in their biography.

And often they also do because of their parents being traumatized or the environment. So but there is a it's not just what we experienced in our life, it's also what we were born into.

The ecosystem, the family system. So the cultural ecosystem really has an effect. And so trauma is much bigger is a system than our individual life. And I think that was very important for me to also publish it like I wrote the book

about.

And I think now the collective dimension of trauma becomes more and more a, buzzword. And I think it also relates to how you started, show today that you, you spoke about the strong polarization between thriving and really, really feeling that the well-being is at zero.

I think that, kind of Kenyon that we see here in this study, there is collective trauma at the root of the strong, difference. Let's, go from being zoomed way out into the this big picture of you, collective trauma and that we're born into a, society and a world which is selectively traumatized.

Let's zoom from that wide perspective into a really narrow one and love it. Have you just share 1 or 2 stories about people when you were doing that work with Holocaust survivors, people in Germany, people in Israel?

I love to hear just a couple of of stories about how that, expressed itself in the personal experience of people who are doing that work. Yeah. First of all, like there is something about creating a container where where we can come together and, and create safety.

So first of all, when we talk about difficult past experiences in our biography or let's say our family members, like we need a safe space. So what we often do is we we create a safe space through relational practices, through contemplative practices, through the way we we kind of interact with each other.

And and when there is enough safety, our nervous system naturally wants to detox the past. So that is a natural self-healing mechanism if it's safe enough.

Because if you feel it's not safe enough, we don't open up because we already expecting another level of pain to happen. So the first I want to say this at the beginning, because I think it's important that we know how important safety is and safety is being created by.

I feel you and I feel how you feel me when, when, when it's not just an intellectual process, but when we really feel each other and our nervous systems being felt is being registered as, it's safer.

And when it's safer, I trust more I can open up more so and so when we create that environment, it's amazing what happens when a group of people listens to one person's sharing.

And, and there is a kind of a group holding through many people practicing I feel you feeling me. It creates a space where people are kind of empowered to share deep aspects of their experience.

And in doing that and being witnessed with the less mental and more curious way of listening, that that in itself already creates a healing. And then, of course, when we go deeper into that experience in a skillful way and, and we do it as much as we can do it in a resource to be, as you said at the beginning, it's very important to resource oneself and not to drown in the pain.

But then that the holding space of a group. I have seen many people share things that they have never said to anybody before in front of a group. And of course, these groups evolve over days.

So to become more and more safe and and close and, and related, and then we can literally see how the, the holding of trauma, stress in our bodies step by step relaxes and tension starts to dissipate.

Fear starts to be integrated. That stress that pushes up into overthink king into tensions in the body and and that all that creates this health issues that you were talking about before.

And we can really see how we step by step kind of ground ourselves together. And then there's more freedom, more fluidity, more, connectedness to one's own body.

We also see how, how often we actually interact, when we feel numb, when we don't feel our body, really, when we

don't feel our emotions, really. And the more we create systemic awareness and be honored that all those defense mechanisms and we pathologize them.

Safety, Healing, and Group Witnessing

And then it's it's an absolute recipe for flourishing together. And I I've seen many of these groups and it's every time again, it's touching. Every time again it's fresh.

There's nothing repetitive or it's, it's, it's a beautiful way to witness human growth together and be part of it. Like we are always growing as a community.

And I think that's that's fascinating. And that's why I think individual healing work in collective spaces is an absolute, highly powerful and empowering, endeavor.

Thomas, one thing you talk about in your book, attune is coherence between what we're thinking and feeling our bodies, our minds, our hearts. And how many of us never really pause to ask ourselves, are we coherent?

Are we congruent? Are all the parts of ourselves moving forward together, or are they in fundamental disharmony? And you guys give us practice that's to actually interrogate our bodies and actually tune in and see if we do that, have that kind of coherence, go ahead and share with us about that whole concept and what to look for, and also what it feels like when we aren't in that space of coherence.

Exactly. And it's beautiful. So, as you said, first of all, just to ask ourselves that question is important because sometimes we are unconsciously in ourselves the way we are and the way we learned it over many years.

And and first it and so. Oh, I ask myself the question, okay, how coherent am I and how much awareness do I have of my body? How much awareness do I have in my daily life interactions of my emotional world?

Is that something that's part of my experience, or is it part? Is it often kind of switched off? And I'm I'm experiencing myself more through my thoughts and my mental intellectual activities, and that's how I process the world.

And it's not that it's good or bad. I think we we want to kind of let go a little bit of judging what is good or bad, then more creating more awareness, because often we pathologize one way or the other too fast, and then we don't create any awareness which is become more judgmental.

And then and then it's good to understand that often because trauma, as you beautifully said at the beginning, in your introduction, is also like, isn't is the body response and the nervous systems response to a strongly overwhelming experience or a moment or, pain?

And this means that we have to shut down a part of our experience, numb it in order to go, because there's so much stress in our body in that moment that we can survive or go through an adverse or painful situation to better.

So the trauma response is actually intelligent. It's an intelligent defense mechanism that's supposed to protect us. And life learned it over hundreds of thousands of years or longer so that that we because often there is a polarizing kind of, judgment on on trauma that it's something.

But of course, the difficult experience is not easy. But what happens in us and what we are working with later is intelligence. And it's very important.

And but it also means that shutting down part of my emotions or my body awareness is often part of that trauma response. So then what I often say what we cannot feel, we overthink.

And so the mind on our intellectual capacity often needs to compensate on what we cannot feel directly when we interact with the world. And then and then that, combined with the scientific age, often makes one of the main defense mechanisms over mental ization, actually hidden in a very scientific in the rational world.

And so we need to, to, to decode that together. And say, okay, this is science and all the breakthroughs and that's amazing. And we want to support it obviously, and make it flourish.

But we want to discern what's me over processing mentally because I don't feel safe in this world, because I feel very stressed, because I cannot feel certain parts of myself and certain parts of others.

That's why I often guess how other people see me. That's why I often guess what they feel about me. That's why I'm often anxious. If I belong. All these, trauma symptoms that might keep me busy and so that the mental activity, the emotions and the body don't express the same information is also something that has been normalized in a collectively traumatized world.

So we grew up in a world where our parents most probably had some of it, our teachers had some of it. When we look at politicians, we see it very often so that a coherence of these three factors and of our relationships is something that's not always around us.

So it's not the normal state. And then we see extraordinary moments of disconnect, disconnected aspects, a part of our daily experience. And so developing an inquiry process and developing an inner kind of witnessing process okay.

Coherence and Emotional Attunement

What's actually happening in my body. Oh, I feel a bit tight or I feel very open. I feel, stressed or I feel relaxed and regulated. It seems like these are the simple things, but they are not that simple at all.

They are not so clear, you know. So so they have access to my emotional range. And I'm not avoiding constantly some emotions and and experiencing some others more.

These are these, this is kind of part of an awareness process. And then once I, I see this more in myself, I begin to feel and see also in my environment.

And if I am not judgment or we shouldn't be like that, but if I begin to hold more space for it, because I understand that fragmentation is an effect of trauma, not not the, kind of an evil inclination, then we create relational spaces that begin to become more healing, then more fragmenting or polarizing.

And I think that's a very important practice. And it's also, in a way, how we interact with our children. And sometimes, bring a very simple example. I say, when my daughter comes to me and says, oh, daddy, daddy, I'm scared.

And then if I respond or react to my daughter, I would say, And I say, oh, don't, don't be scared. There's nothing dangerous in the house. So what did I do?

I devalued the emotional experience of my daughter. I said, don't be scared, but my daughter is already scared. So. And the second thing is, I gave my daughter a rational answer when she actually needs something emotional from me.

The other possibility would be, I mean, there are many, but the other possibility would be and say, okay, I feel you're scared. Come to me, come to me.

And in that moment, I create a connection to her emotional experience. My body feels her stress. I feel her stress. I offer her co regulation in the moment she feels felt by me.

Her nervous system can relax. Her stress level goes down. She can co regulate her fear with me. She feels safe because she feels seen. And then I can see when her nervous system relaxes a bit and some of her functions in her brain come back, then I can say okay let's have a look what's happening here if there is anything dangerous.

So I bring in rational leadership. But after I met the emotional need that that creates a completely different, experience for her and she feels, oh, my emotions of being hurt met.

And that means her fear is actually a shared space. And like this, we feel emotionally empowered and we can integrate our emotional experiences and their ways that come and go.

And they're healthy, they're part of life. And so we can stay more open. I think that's a that's a great example to to for the first, more theoretical part, Thomas, one of the things I enjoyed in your book, attuned was the whole concept of what you call three sync practice, and that's both attuning to what you feel, that coherence you mentioned earlier and then attuning to others.

Go ahead. Describe that for us and how you practice it. Yeah. It's it's it starts with okay. So I our breath is a fantastic function. So when I connect to my breath I exhale a few times, I travel with my exhalations into my body.

And I notice where do I feel lively, energized in my body. So I connect to the parts that I can feel easily. I get to know my body in different places I see, okay, how do my legs feel?

How does my belly feel? My chest? I go through my body and I get to know my body. And the more I practice that, the more capacity I develop. And then I can ask myself, how stressed am I?

Am I? How much stress do I feel on the scale of 1 to 10? And if I feel stressed or tense? So then I embrace those sensations. If I feel relaxed to deepen the relaxation through my breathing, and then and then I can ask myself, okay, that was the physical dimension of sensations.

And I can ask myself, okay, what's my emotion right now? Sometimes emotions are strong, but sometimes emotions are very subtle. There's a little bit of joy in the background, there's a little bit of anxiety, there's a little bit of whatever love or, a little bit of irritation or anger and, and so whatever I find, I say yes to and sometimes I will notice and I ask, I cannot tell how I feel.

It may be a bit numb and it's also good. So we, we bring awareness to that. Then I can ask myself, okay, how do I feel mentally? How does my mind feel?

Am I very busy and stressed? Sometimes the thinking is very tight sometimes. So thinking is very creative and open and inspired. So it's calm, it's busy, it's tight, it's open.

And then and then I also pay attention how relational do I feel, how I feel open to them. My environment will be tight and retracted into myself, and that's also an amazing transition into attunement to others.

So I attuned to myself. It's like you, you tune your instrument. When you have a guitar or a piano, you need to tune it from time to time so it plays music beautifully.

That's the same with us. We are the instrument. And then my body right now is in resonance with your body. So practicing. I feel you and I feel how you feel me is the basic building block of relating.

So the more we practice that, we call that in, in, in neuroscience there's a word is called neuro ception. And and we our nervous systems are socially wired.

So we are actually always tuning anyway. So nobody there is nobody in the world that never attuned to anybody else. We do this because we are wired like this.

As children, we attuned to our parents all the time. It doesn't matter if they're there or not. When they're not there for a long time, then we kind of take it back.

But we know how to attune. It's it's biologically wired. And and then when I, when we feel each other then we often say in, in the human practice, it's a practice I feel myself I feel this space in between us.

Because in this space in between us, I feel how you attune to me, how attuned to you, how open is our data connection? And that neuro reception principle says when we feel each other, we feel safe with each other.

When we don't feel each other, we feel a little bit more distant. We notice maybe from daily life and somebody is a bit more distant. I ask myself, oh, does the person like me was distant?

What's going on? We have become a bit more uncertain. When we feel somebody is more open, we feel more safe.

Three-Sync Practice and Relational Resonance

So that's great because every one of us can provide that space of attunement, and that makes the environment, that ecosystem that we create feel a bit more safe.

It's something we contribute, and maybe it will not work every time, because sometimes we get triggered by stuff, but we can practice that, and then we can also listen more to to the other person's experience.

So then I feel you two like how you body feels. My body resonates with your body. My emotions resonate with your emotions. So there is a kind of a whole data transfer going on.

And I often say attunement is like a good internet connection because you can't speak, you know, because the internet is great, but without great internet we would just have this conversation.

And that's also how it looks like in life. When we are not tuned, we often have misunderstandings. So we have conflicts, we have tensions, we have all kinds of side effects from ill attunement.

And not being attuned opens the door for traumatization. We cannot retraumatize each other when we are, when we feel each other, so we traumatization or traumatization happens in not attuned spaces because we are too stressed.

We are to whatever that we can feel each other anymore. So that's why I think it's a very important individual, relational and social contribution. Thomas, this whole idea of dehumanization of the other is a necessary condition for war and for for conflict, because you can't really, kill a person who you feel, feel close to.

And, I was so struck by the studies showing that when excavations were made of American Civil War battlefields and they retrieved, they retrieved thousands of muskets from these battlefields, and they find that half of the soldiers never fired their muskets.

They could not point against somebody else and pull the trigger. Same thing happened in World War two, and in fact, the Army had to retrain people after World War two, before the Vietnam War, before the Korean War, because they, they, they found that that that something like, you know, 30% of all soldiers could not point a gun.

And fire it at another, another human being. So we're not we're we're definitely not wired that way. That's very true. That's very, very strong. What you're saying, I think it's very important that we all keep that in mind.

Yeah, yeah. So that dehumanization process that leads to conflict and, you know, you point out in the, in attuned how, that dehumanization process happens even at the level of our own bodies.

And you're first trying to welcome us to not not dehumanizing, not not splitting away and having that separation from our body. And then you move that into our relationship.

So that wonderful concept of the relation field you talk about in attunement and then to these apply to these huge social issues and knowing that there are these big, big, fields of trauma that that are collective.

So in the last part of our talk here today, this may be a little bit of an unfair question, but is this a fixable problem?

Yeah. First of all, first of all, I think it's very important that we create the public awareness that it is an issue that we are all part of.

The collective trauma doesn't just exist outside. We all have been born into a world that was already heard over many generations and healed itself and got hurt again and healed.

It's like it's a process that's ongoing. And I think the first step is a public awareness building. The second step is I think we I have seen in many of the large scale groups and, and workshops we have done with lots of people like really big groups, that the power of.

It's like I often compare it to a laptop and a quantum computer, like when, when a, like an individual and in an isolated form, like I just with myself look at the collective trauma like it's a huge iceberg.

And while we talk in all this crisis fields, Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen and others, there's more trauma happening than I think can be integrated in the time that we are talking here.

So it looks like it's it's too big. But on the other hand, I've seen in this collective healing moments that when we come together as is communities and and also like the community that you create here, like this, communities have a lot of power and it can create a lot of resilience, relationality, safety, an environment that has a much higher integration power than separate individuals.

So if we if we, you know, one day, like there was a time there weren't any hospitals and then we discovered, wow, it would be really great to have hospitals for people that need medical care.

Collective Trauma as a Fixable Public Health Issue

And it really changed something in society. I think we need a we need something similar, not a hospital, but in instruction and architecture in a society that will be supported by the state.

But a government that to deal with the collective trauma decisions that we were born into, that are part of our societal fabrics, is a public health, must not just an option, because I think over 5 or 10 years in having spaces where we can integrate our collective wounds and our collective trauma decisions would change our healthcare costs dramatically, would decrease, would would increase wellbeing and health in our society would transform the frozen.

This. There's so much energy frozen in the trauma in our societies when that gets liquefied and released step by step, there's a lot of creativity. There's a lot of post-traumatic learning, there's a lot of wisdom.

There's a lot of ethical learning. As a consequence, I think we would decrease racism. We would decrease anti-Semitism. We would decrease violence by, domestic violence in families.

We would increase public health in many, many ways. We would decrease criminal rates. We will decrease incarceration. There are so many symptoms that actually a trauma, symptoms that can be changed if we if we develop an architecture and the fact that it doesn't exist, it doesn't mean that it's not possible.

The hospital also didn't exist and then it existed. So we need to make it happen. And I think that it's it's definitely a doable thing. I think it's one of the root causes also that lead to climate change, the fragmentation, the December element that is a result of trauma is also a lack of feedback loops in the biosphere, and the dysregulated behavior that can be changed through integration.

And I believe we need that resilience in order to deal with climate change impacts, because that creates, again, a lot of trauma. And if we're too fragmented, we can deal with hundreds of millions of climate refugees in the next decade.

So I think it's actually something we have to do, and it will contribute a lot to our health and well-being, to our

flourishing, and to the what I often call the risks respecting human rights when we see human rights is the right to be, to be in life, the right to become, to flourish and have a meaning and the purpose and the right to belong, to be part of a healthy relational network.

I think if we support this in everybody we know and in ourselves, then I think we create a flourishing world together. And so, yeah, I think it's a necessity.

Thank you so much. I so appreciate you focusing on that vision of global flourishing. And now this is a necessity, not an option for us if we're to to meet the challenges of today's world.

So thank you so much, Thomas. It's been a joy to connect with you and everyone. Go ahead and do these processes for yourself. Find your own flourishing.

It all begins with you. That's the way change spreads out to the world. Till next time, be healthy, be happy and love yourself. All the best. Thank you for tuning in to Doctor Talks.

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