



Gestalt NEWS Foundation

INFORMATIVE AND COMMUNICATIVE SIX-MONTH ISSUE OF GESTALT FOUNDATION
PSYCHOTHERAPY & TRAINING CENTER / Spring 2012 / 16th issue



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Psychotherapy & cancer

Our Piggy Bank

14ο Τετράμηρο Workshop Ψυχοθεραπείας Gestalt



"Σκέπτομαι, αισθάνομαι, παρατηρώ, πειραματίζομαι, εξελίσσομαι"
Το βίωμα και η διαδικασία στη θεραπεία Gestalt

10 - 13 Μαΐου 2012

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14th Day workshop Gestalt Psychotherapy

*"Thinking, feeling,
observing,
experimenting, growing"*

Experience and process in Gestalt Therapy

10- 13 May 2012

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από κακοποιήσεις και
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activity in Xanthi

collabotation with the
**INFIRMARY OF
PALEA PENTELEI**

Editorial

Spring is well and truly here and swifts are

back in town. Unaware of human crises the birds' scheduled migration flight is on time. Thankfully, some things do not change. Like the life-giving sun, the trees turning green, the blooming flowers.

What also remains steady is our need to maintain our hope and optimism, our desire and strength for life, the beauty and creativity of human relations, the deep instinctive knowledge that crises and loss may lead to growth and development.

All these have been topics of the events we have recently organised, in the form of open lectures, experiential seminars, interviews, new cooperation schemes or group decisions as to how to express our solidarity for people facing greater needs than ourselves.

What we can offer as psychotherapists is food for thought and some change in regard to what is feasible for each one of us. Such feasible goals usually concern undertaking our personal responsibilities, changing our mentality and

attitude to life and the way of relating to ourselves and others. This is exactly the core of our actions at Gestalt Foundation. Events, voluntary actions, lectures open to the general public, training people who wish to change some daily life aspects of their own or of those around them.

Have a good read!

Antonia Konstantinidou

Contact E-mail address: konstant108@gmail.com



Antonia Konstantinidou, M.Sc. Clinical and Social Psychology A.U.TH. (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki). Gestalt therapy Therapist, Trainer and Supervisor. Co-founder of the Gestalt Foundation Centre for Psychotherapy and Training. Recognised member of the Association of Greek Psychologists (AGP), the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP) and the European Association of Gestalt Therapy (EAGT). Founding member of the Greek Association of Gestalt Psychotherapists. I have been working as a therapist with adults and groups of adults for 16 years. For the last 10 years I have been involved in psychological support for people suffering from chronic illnesses, as well as the training of volunteers.

“ FEAR OF FREEDOM ” Part 1

[Fromm, E. (1971). *Fear of Freedom* - Translated by D. Theodorakatos. Athens: Boukoumanis' Publishing House].

Konstantinos Kostas
Social Worker, Psychologist,
Gestalt Psychotherapist
(email: k.konstantinos@yahoo.gr)

The book I'm recommending in this note was published approximately 70 years ago (1941), during the Second World War, when political and economic totalitarianism swept through Europe and the U.S. However, when reading it now, one gets the impression it was written yesterday.

The writer, Erich Fromm (1900-1980), is considered one of the leading psychotherapists and social philosophers of the 20th century. Without going into detail about his life and work, I would like to note certain references indicating that Fromm's life intersected that of Perls'. Firstly, they were both a part of the wider circle of Germany's intellectuals during the war and had a number of mutual acquaintances. Fromm, who was a member of both the Frankfurt Psychoanalysis Institute and the Frankfurt Institute for Social Studies, where the famous Frankfurt School (Marx Horkheimer's circle) emerged from, also functioned as a consistent personal liaison between Perls and the

institutes (Bocian, 1998:237). Perls met with Fromm again in 1946, a few months after the former had arrived in the U.S.A. from S. Africa. Fromm, who had read *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* and had formed a positive opinion of the book, encouraged Perls to settle in New York and start a private practice (Clarkson and Mackewn, 1993:17). This encouragement proved to be valuable, as it came at a time when Perls was ready to move back to S. Africa out of despair from his seeming failure at making a fresh start in the United

book recommended

States. Fromm is reported to have told Perls: "If you come, I guarantee that you'll have clients within the first three months". Indeed, Perls moved to New York and established some clientele there in three weeks (Laura Perls in Wysong and Rosenfeld, 1988:3-25). In New York, Perls networked with members of the White Institute, founded by Erich Fromm and Clara Thomson. As Perls himself has said, among the members of the Institute, he found people who spoke the same language and viewed the world in the same way (Clarkson and Mackewn,

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The Gestalt Foundation participated at the Pan-Hellenic Conference of Young Volunteer Blood Donors

Having been invited by the **Pan-Hellenic Committee of Young Volunteer Blood Donors**, the Gestalt Foundation participated in the **5th Pan-Hellenic Conference**, which took place in **Arta** on **March 17, 2012**. Due to other commitments, both in Athens and Thessaloniki, the founding members of the GF could not attend the conference and, consequently, I was asked to represent the Training Centres especially seeing that I now live in the nearby town of Preveza, so my location was also favourable. The GF and, in particular, Antonia Konstantinidou, stood by me throughout the conference, offering me guidelines, instructions, presentation material, support and encouragement. As the Gestalt Foundation's representative, therefore, and as one of the Centre's psychotherapy graduates, I acquired a wealth of experience. I must begin by referring the warm welcome and care I received from the conference's coordinating committee, something which relieved my initial anxiety. The audience consisted of young adults, aged 18 to 30, who were truly interested with a strong desire to be of help. Prominent figures from the local community and clergy also honoured the conference with their presence.

Even though the number of participants this year was satisfactory, it was still lower than what it used to be in previous years, something which may be attributed to the problems the Greek society has been facing in the past few years. It was because of this that the Gestalt Foundation, focusing on the now and the current state of events, participated by presenting a lecture titled **"Volunteering during Crisis"**. What we were hoping to achieve through this lecture was to give the audience a better understanding of the phase process they are going through, i.e., that they are part of a wider field, that they, too, are affected by changes taking place, and that with every change there is loss. But at the same time this crisis can also act as a challenge for us, calling upon us to come up with new ways of communication, coexisting and developing. This is true for organisation members among themselves and for voluntary organisations vis-à-vis, each other. Truth be told, volunteering is a fundamental part of the social fabric and perhaps, through this crisis, this human value may blossom further. We might be able to escape introversion and fear and to address and share with those around us.

This need for rallying and mutual support also emerged in the subsequent workshop I coordinated, on the topic **"The Psychology of a Volunteer Today"**. I observed that it was clear these young volunteer blood donors felt that their levels of energy and enthusiasm had been reduced as compared to how they had initially felt, but, at the same time, they were determined to continue fighting for their cause, especially at an individual level. It is also encouraging that during every single workshop presented by members of the committee, the need for strengthening relationships through various events and collective action was discussed.

During this experience I felt like a connecting bridge between the

Gestalt Foundation and the Pan-Hellenic Committee of Young Volunteer Blood Donors, and had a strong feeling of responsibility. I had been given the chance, support and encouragement by the Gestalt Foundation and had received a warm welcome, care and appreciation by the Committee of Young Volunteer Blood Donors. I also met young people I admired and used their values and qualities as an example: it was the value of participating in an effort to save a human life.

Anthi Gogoni
Gestalt Foundation Graduate

Athens, April 3, 2012
Protocol Reg. No.: 36
To: The Gestalt Foundation Centre
for Psychotherapy and Training

5th Update of the Pan-Hellenic
Conference of Young Volunteer Blood Donors



It is a non-stop struggle to maintain a sufficient supply of voluntarily donated blood and to increase the number of organ donors; this is why everyone's contribution is considered essential.

To this why, the Board of PENEVA, the Pan-Hellenic Committee of Young Volunteer Blood Donors, in collaboration with the Association of Volunteer Blood Donors of Arta, successfully organised the 5th Pan-Hellenic Conference of Young Volunteer Blood Donors. Thanks to the educational activities organised, young people become better informed and more aware of aspects concerning voluntary blood donation.

The conference ran smoothly and successfully thanks to Ms. Anthi Gogoni and Ms. Antonia Kostantinidou, members of the Gestalt Foundation Centre of Psychotherapy and Training, who generously contributed with their knowledge. Based on their own experience, the two ladies undertook the task of guiding participants through the topic of "Volunteering during Crisis", and took part in the group discussions that followed, assisting young people not only in evaluating the current situation, but also in suggesting solutions for current problems/dilemmas.

The Board of PENEVA would like to warmly thank Ms. Gogoni and Ms. Konstantinidou for their contribution.

We believe that the members of the Committee of Young Volunteer Blood Donors participating in the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Volunteer Blood Donors' Associations (POSEA), through receiving the right information, will not only be part of a promising future, but also drive for change and raise awareness within Greek society. Therefore, their contribution is invaluable.

Sincerely,

For the Board of the Pan-Hellenic Committee of Young Volunteer Blood Donors,

The Chairman
Dimitris Tantsides

The Secretary
Pavlos Patronas

Continued from page 2

1993:17). Through Fromm's encouragement and support by the White Institute, it was possible for Perls to become established in the US and that was the starting point of developing Gestalt Therapy.

My recommendation for this book is based on the following: 1) Its aim is to study the meaning of freedom for present-day individuals; this study is immensely important in the current world climate, where freedom is increasingly limited by the intensity of economic, political and religious totalitarianism; 2) It offers a comprehensive and coherent picture of Western societies and challenges faced by people, through the lens of "dialectical humanism", a term coined by Fromm to describe his theory (Passakos, 1994:298- Papageorgiou, 1990). This is essential, as a guiding framework, amidst the confusion and obscurity created by cultural and political propaganda, advertising and bombardment of information; 3) Finally, I find that this book is of tremendous clinical interest, since Fromm's description of freedom portrays what very often takes place within therapy, where we see that freedom may be expensive, but slavery is even more so.

The main thesis of the book *"is that modern man, freed from the bonds of pre-individualistic society, which simultaneously gave him security and limited him, has not gained freedom in the positive sense of the realization of his individual self; that is, the expression of his intellectual, emotional and sensuous potentialities. Freedom, though it has brought him independence and rationality, has made him isolated and, thereby, anxious and powerless. This isolation is unbearable and the alternatives he is confronted with are either to escape from the burden of this freedom into new dependencies and submission or to advance to the full realization of positive freedom which is based upon the uniqueness and individuality of man"* (p. 14). Fromm's axis of analysis is the notion of individuation, both in the context of the history of the

human species as well as in the context of a man's life. Fromm goes as far as to identify freedom with individuation, when he says that *"Freedom is the active and total fulfillment of an individual's ego"* (p. 305).

According to Fromm, the meaning of freedom changes depending on how far a person is self-aware and conscious as an independent and separate being. A human will flourish as an individual when they begin to disassociate the state of individuation from the physical world and recognise themselves as entities separate from nature and humans surround them. This self-awareness was hardly discernible for a long time. Fromm names the process of dismissing one's primordial ties as "the individuation process" and argues that it rapidly accelerated in the centuries following the Protestant Reformation and leading to modern times (14th - 20th centuries).

Furthermore, according to the writer, individuation, or differentiation has two aspects: 1) **The development of self-strength**, which stems from the all-increasing child's physical, emotional and mental abilities and leads to clashes with their environment and, consequently, an intense distinction between "Me" - "You"; and 2) **Growing aloneness**, which is brought on by this separation from a world which, in comparison with one's own individual existence, is overwhelmingly strong and powerful, and often threatening and dangerous (p. 44-45). Based on the second aspect of individuation, Fromm introduces **the notion of the feeling of aloneness and weakness** and argues that man's biggest fear is the fear of being abandoned, alone in a weak state. When one feels lonely and weak, there is an urge to abandon their individuality and suppress the feeling of loneliness and weakness they are experiencing by fully dissolving themselves in the outside world. When freedom becomes an unbearable burden that needs to be gotten rid of, the transition from freedom to totalitarianism becomes possible.

LECTURES IANOS LECTURES IANOS

ATHENS

On Monday March 12, 2012, between 20:30 and 22:30, Despina Balliou gave a lecture at IANOS Bookshop on the topic:

"Creativity and Beauty in Human Relationships"

Most of us long to have relationships that are lively and warm, relationships that are lasting and promote our development.

In answer to the questions "Really, can there be beauty and creativity in human relationships? Can we truly highlight them in a world where we very often threaten one another? Is it even worth the effort?"

Our deepest belief, as Gestalt psychotherapists, is that YES, we can. All we need to do is be willing to work on our relationships, invest in them, take risks, and make the commitment that, regardless of how tough life can be, we will remain open to the challenges and invitations of human experience.

Creativity plays an important role in the growth and maintenance of such relationships. According to the Gestalt psychotherapeutic approach, creativity is a relational process. The moment we begin to interact, we begin to create.

Beauty, on the other hand, is an aesthetic quality which has no meaning whatsoever if not connected to the person looking at it, listening to it, focusing their attention on it. We need one another to help experiences of beauty between us emerge to the surface.

Creativity and beauty are both based on contact and creative adaptation; on contact which allows for difference, on experience and experimentation, on creative destabilisation, on maintaining the interest and on humour.

This is what Antonis Zairis, a member of the lecture audience, commented:

It is this other aspect of the Gestalt way of viewing creativity and beauty in our relationships, which tickled my interest in attending this lecture.

The area around "IANOS", with "Attikon" cinema burnt down, hardly echoed creativity or beauty. I must admit my high spirits were somewhat dampened. Despina's calm voice, however, and her simple, penetrating words travelled me to a different "dimension".

Was it, I wonder, the creative manner of the presentation that brought back instances when I had, indeed, chosen alternative ways of contact?

THES/KI

On Friday March 2, 2012, Katia Chatzilakou gave a lecture at IANOS Bookshop of Thessaloniki.

It was Friday evening and I was quickly getting ready to go to the lecture. "I'll be late..." I thought. That was immediately followed by the cheeky thought that, "Well, lectures often start twenty-odd minutes late, anyway..." I finally arrived at 19:05; I had stood my friend up a little and she was still waiting for me outside the IANOS Bookshop. "I'm sorry", I told her, and a few seconds later thought to myself "So it's already started....I'm not even inside the hall and I've already apologised once...what's going to happen once we are inside?"

The silence on the floor where the lecture was to take place was such that I thought I had probably made a mistake in the date or time. My previous thought that lectures often start late was hardly true. The hall was crowded and the people captivated even as the lecture was about to begin. "So punctual", I thought and wondered why I should have thought any different.

Right across, next to a big screen, was Christina, ready to act, and a bit further there was Katia who, like a hostess, welcomed us with a sweet glance - both of them looking pretty like dolls.

I looked around the hall and tried to spot faces I recognised in the crowd. I saw a few, and then started observing all those I didn't. There was, indeed, a crowd. I felt lucky we had found a place to stand, as more and more people kept arriving.

Finally, a story began to be projected on the screen: it was the story of Medea told in a slightly different way. The combination of drama, film, comments and songs was unbelievable! When I had first heard the topic, I thought it was very good, but I also wondered how people would sit and deal with a tragedy through a lecture. And what if not all the people know the story? How will they follow what is going on? In the end everything had been anticipated and, if I'm not mistaken, I even managed to catch Zoe's name in the titles of video credits.

It was thrilling. All of us watched a film together (an artistic collage, in a way) and one could hardly hear people breathing in the hall. As soon as the film finished, Katia spoke about the theme in general, but we had all reached such a state of mind that I was reminded more of group therapy. It was so warm. Such a beautiful approach to human pain, the pain of man and woman... she presented so many

different points of view as she spoke, and so many truths about each side, all spoken by the same mouth. I felt something inside of me soften. I think the most intense feeling I experienced was that of understanding. Understanding the people who took part in this story or, maybe, another story as well; understanding people who starred and those who were in the audience; those called to start forgiving others and themselves so they can go on living after their own personal tragedies.

To my eyes the presentation was exceptional. The material, the films and the music, was beautiful... one could feel the quality. And the manner was different, easier, without the distance one may often feel at lectures. One could feel that the person delivering the speech was, indeed, just another person making their own way in life.

People seemed touched and the lecture was well-timed, allowing the audience time for questions. I later thought that the questions asked were seeking sympathy rather than knowledge. It was as if people had been moved and were saying: "Alright, I'll start, but you do realise it's going to be difficult, don't you?"

When we finally left, my friend demanded we go out for beer. "I had to control myself so I would not burst into crying", she told me, and went on to say: "I have so many things I want to tell you". And that's how the conversation began, and it continued for a while.

When I got home, I felt well and deeply. I couldn't believe that all that had happened at a lecture. I thought it had to do with me or the years of therapy, but my friend, who has never been to a single session in her life, felt the same.

Thinking about my own issues and forgiveness I felt my eyes swell; tears came up ...and this time I didn't let them roll. I tested them... I always wondered what forgiveness tastes like. When I felt in a good mood I said that it probably tastes sweet. When I wasn't in too good a mood I said that it'd probably taste bitter due to so many unpleasant situations but, what can you do, in order to go forward you have to taste it.

After the lecture I thought that, maybe, forgiveness has my own taste.

I'd like to express my thanks not only for the quality, but also for my psychological health-related gastronomic recommendations.

You're very welcome, and so on!!

A member of the audience

LECTURES IANOS LECTURES IANOS

THES/KI

On Friday, January 13, 2012, Antonia Konstantinidou gave a lecture at IANOS Bookshop in Thessaloniki, titled: "Learning to say 'goodbye', I learn to live".

The weekend that followed, she coordinated an experiential workshop on the same topic.

Ellie Frengidou, a participant, relates her experience in her own words:

"Learning to say 'goodbye', I learn to live".

*No easy to live
For the sake of your shadow
-please, believe me-
To tame words
about days I cannot overcome*

*To let disconnected 'ands'
and changing 'buts'
in the grand embrace
of dawn*

*To feed my words
condensed clouds
Not easy at all
-please, believe me-*

*To bridge the waves
to fold year upon year
and place them
in cardboard boxes.*

*Is there a place where my words can fit?
Shamefully naked
syllables, intert
and no channel fit for the conflict*

*Hardly literate
To talk of rivers,
of lights
of streets that never knew glory.*

*Here I am
wondering
how and where
might I find
myself
so as to meet you?*

It's been a few months now since I've tried my hardest to say 'goodbye'... I looked for ways to forgive or to blame; I counted mistakes, I regressed stubbornly, often looked backwards, cried like a child simply because I couldn't have it my way...

I often wonder what is this thrusting force that makes me touch upon subjects that rub plenty of salt into my wounds...?

Each one of us had come to this meeting hand-in-hand with something they had lost at some earlier point in time, when unprepared. And, I wonder, when do we feel this deep certainty that we can let go of something we feel is ours?

So, in a tight embrace with something we never managed to let go of by ourselves, we gathered in a circle of release to let go of the pain, the loved faces, the sadness, the figures.

They say that when you share something that truly hurts you, the sorrow becomes sweeter; it takes on a different form and extends a reconciliatory hand.



And then, candles of oblivion are lit... Up until now, I believed that letting go is something dark. Just now, I have learnt that to say 'goodbye' means to 'shed light on'. Give a figure light, and then I can merely let it go. I may forgive it or violently push it away, but, either way, I let it go.

And so, separately but so close, I encounter the other side of life, and make space for all new things.

I realise I meet with Antonia at times of great joy or extreme sorrow. She takes me by the hand, as if I'm hypnotised, and we walk together for a while, and then, it's like she leaves me respectfully, certain that I'll manage to walk on, down my own lonely road.

This reminds me of those moments when my father used to teach me how to ride a bike and, at some point, he let go of me or I just let go of him, so I could fly away "biking" to places I didn't even know how to walk to...

Ellie Frengidou, M.Sc.
Psychologist, Gestalt Foundation Graduate

ATHENS

On Monday, February 6, 2012, between 18:00 and 20:00, Yianna Yiamarelou gave a lecture at IANOS Bookstore, titled: "Living or Surviving?"

Support mechanisms, like the established belief that everything new and difficult is "a problem" can very often lead to a feeling of inadequacy or entrapment, a stalemate state. The lecture focused on how difficulties in the present can become a challenge to act and experience, leading to new paths in our lives.

This is what Sofia Regoukou, a member of the audience at this lecture, comments:

Monday evening and the weather is not that encouraging for walking around the centre of Athens. It's pouring down with rain! The need, though, to find answers to the questions of modern life and the desire to escape the dilemma "Am I living or surviving?" makes me dress up warmly, umbrella in hand, and head towards IANOS Bookshop. There, Yianna Yiamarelou is presenting a lecture on that very topic.

The audience came from all social strata and was impatient, I was no

exception! Sitting in the first row, I waited for the speaker to explain, clarify and guide my thoughts down new paths. Her words were simple and comprehensible; her narration ideally paced to maintain one's interest, our involvement through "games" which awoke the senses was the best way for us to experience everything she explained.

I realise that the problem lies in fixed ideas in one's mind, which runs ahead of itself and traps us; in "obstacles" of the past that keep us from opening up new paths in our lives, from finding new, creative ways to face the challenges (and invitations) of life. I begin to feel that this "fog" that has gathered around me due to insecurity, mistaken beliefs and established mannerisms is starting to clear. The "path" I need to follow becomes more apparent. My route may be uphill, but it will lead me to...greener pastures.

The speaker's words still echo in my ears. All it took was an afternoon at the cafe of IANOS Bookshop on Stadiou Street for hope and optimism, if nothing else, to start boiling inside me: There is a way, I think. All it takes is a bit of practice, and then it will be an integral part of me. When it's time to leave, the rain is coming down harder. Inside me, though, I am sure that the rainbow will not be long to arrive...



>> On Sunday November 20, 2011, during the Oncology Conference “Cancer can be beaten” held at “Titania” Hotel, Yianna Yiamarelou and Kostas Michaelides presented the topic:

“Instilling Hope”

Some light in the dark tunnel the patient is experiencing when faced with a cancer diagnosis.

>> On Sunday January 29, 2012, from 11:00 to 15:00, Alexandros Ardavanis and Yianna Yiamarelou, with the help of T. Divari, E. Kaloudi and E. Paparizou, organised a theoretical presentation and an experiential workshop at the Meeting of the Association of Cancer-patients'-Volunteers Friends Physicians, titled:

“Chemotherapy and Psychotherapy”

During this presentation, the focus was on the effect of chemotherapy on cancer patients, making reference to recent studies that highlight the effect of chemotherapy on patients' psychobiological functions. Psychological coping mechanisms available to patients were also explored, as well as ways in which such mechanisms may enhance or weaken their organism's defence.

Reference was also made to the importance of a patient's immediate and broader environment, i.e. the support available to them from family, friends, social support networks, carers, doctors, nurses, etc., as well as the impact this environment might have on the prognosis of the disease.

Our Piggy Bank

The 1st year students at the Gestalt Foundation Centre for Psychotherapy and Training have a piggy bank which 'lives' at the centre's entrance. The target was to financially support a large family, with a child suffering from leukaemia. Our initiative was embraced by the centre through donations made by all kinds of visitors, resulting in our little piggy-bank “fattening up”! Once this goal is fulfilled, the piggy bank will remain at the Centre; its humanitarian 'action' mission will be renewed in response to your suggestions and depending on contributions received.

The occasion arose when cutting the traditional New Year pie for the members of our yearas Katia, our coordinator and mentor, explained. One lucky coin, two surprise gifts in case “luck” was 'stuck' between two pieces. Margarita, our seminar's co-coordinator was the “lucky one”. Her gift was a piggy bank, an undoubtedly symbolic and timely gift! Katia suggested raffling the second piggy bank off amongst trainees. Alexandra was the one who initially suggested the idea of a “common” piggy bank for a “common goal”. Her idea, as anticipated, received a positive response: we unanimously agreed to keep the piggy bank at the centre to be used for a charitable purpose.

What we remained to be decided was “the purpose”, so we started brainstorming ideas and suggestions. The “SOS Children's Village”, the “Smile of a Child” and the “Arc of the World” were amongst the organisations suggested since they were non-profit and charitable agencies. What was coincidentally noticed was that almost all our suggestions concerned helping children, so we limited the range of options to those organisations focusing on caring for children. Still, though, choices were numerous and opinions varied. In the end, Katerina's e-mail saved us from having to make a difficult choice. Her proposal regarded young Hara, a little girl in hospital suffering from leukaemia. Our financial contribution would financially support Hara's family towards the cost of the girl's bone marrow transplantation.

So our piggy bank “wore” its tag explaining our cause, and everybody's contributions have been touching. During periods of “crisis”, at many levels, a donation might even be insignificant vis-a-vis major economic impasses. However, it's a collective move, which shows “presence” and “proximity”. This is how we, as first year studentss, give significance to our action of solidarity and would like to thank you all for your support!

Christina Varsamoudi,

1st year student, Gestalt Foundation.

“The effect of the crisis on our mental state: How can we help ourselves?”

Interview to Despina Balliou to www.kano-oikonomia.gr

1. In the last 3 years, we have experienced an acute financial crisis. How has this affected people's mental state?

Firstly, I don't believe the crisis is merely financial, but also deeply social and existential that's why there are effects at many levels: personal or inter-personal and not only in Greece but also around the globe.

The emotions experienced are anxiety, insecurity, fear, a feeling of powerlessness. A sense of injustice prevails, whilst one experiences shame and guilt, since they feel powerless to cope and take care of themselves and their families. There are also blasts of anger and aggression. All of the above deeply affect all relationships, whether interpersonal, familial, friendly or erotic, and may result in individuals feeling lonely and isolated.

It should be underlined that the above are not experienced in exactly the same way by all Greeks. The way each human is affected is very personal and unique. Many factors, such as the environment they live in, their history, their character, their abilities and limitations, their motives, as well as their willingness and ability to creatively adapt to difficult circumstances influence one's response to the crisis.

As a result, some people may become militant, whereas others sink in passivity; some might be optimistic, some may believe and hope, while others may see themselves as prey to circumstances. Such serious crises certainly don't leave us unaffected and intact. Our survival and existence are definitely threatened to some extent and this generates fear. Whether the fear becomes terror or panic, though, depends on the person and their circumstances.

2. Some people now ask for psychological help but can't afford it. How can they be helped?

There are facilities, such as Hospitals, Psychological Health Centres, Volunteer Organisations, Associations, etc, where one could seek support and health. The psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors may offer some *pro bono* services, depending on the case, the need and their professional competence, within the context of ethics and morality.

But what we also need to know is that a person's quest for help does not solely depend on whether they can afford it or not. There are other factors, like their attitude towards a psychologist and the profession itself, their willingness to process their difficulties and issues through this particular process, their motivation, trust, and commitment. There are also many people who choose medicines as a solution to their problems, which, even though necessary in some cases, may simply be the easy way out in others.

3. Under the new measures, many institutions are expected to close down. Are there alternatives for their clients or will they inevitably face marginalisation?

I cannot respond to this question; it would be like prejudging the situation. What I know for certain is that institutions closing down will have a very negative impact. Just like physical care, mental care is equally important. Looking after and respecting those who suffer mentally shows not only a country's but also society's moral and human standards.

4. What would you propose to offset the crisis? (New hobbies? Laughter? Positive thinking?)

I don't think what we need is to offset the crisis. I think that, on the one hand, it's necessary for us to allow some space for our self-awareness so as to reflect, think deeply, explore our capacities and creativity and deploy our courage and faith in life, while, on the other hand, it is also important not to lose contact with other people.

Our channels of contact and communication should be those of mutual support, solidarity and sharing, not letting steam off by airing our emotions and thoughts. I believe we should not become isolated and shut ourselves in our own thoughts, but communicate and relate to others.

As for activities, creative hobbies truly help our psychological balance. Exercise, a walk in the countryside, gardening, music, arts and crafts, etc are all positive ways to find some relief.

5. How can somebody have positive thoughts when their fridge is empty and they cannot feed their children?

This question sounds too rigid. What does positive thinking mean? Willingness and motivation to survive is all we need: not to lose our strength, courage and will for life.

6. Did this situation bring about anything good? For example, did it bring people closer to each other? To think? To get rid of overconsumption, maybe?

It has often been said that every crisis is also an opportunity at a social and personal level.

It is an opportunity for us to explore how we consume, how we interact, how we fight for things, how we participate in society, how we are grateful, how we connect with each other, what it means to lose, what it means to win, what our priorities and choices are, and so on.

It is also an opportunity to generate new ideas or bring about changes in our lives and our work, which we either did not have the time for or were not oriented towards before.

Correction: In the text "Knowledge, experience, art and techniques" published in the previous issue, in the introduction's poem passage was accidentally written Elytis instead of Cavafy as the poet.

New action

A new "Volunteer Training" activity in Xanthi

A few years ago, when I started coordinating my first psychological support group with the Association of people suffering from cancer and friends in Xanthi, "Remaining Lively", I couldn't have imagined that there would be this aspect, as well, i.e. the volunteer training group. The idea was first discussed a couple of years ago, when the Association's Chairwoman, Ms. Nopi Ksenopoulou, informed me that approximately twenty people had signed up as volunteers. When I communicated that message to the Association's supervisory committee, their response was positive and, in fact, the head, Antonia Kostantinidou, was happy to support this effort and, in particular, the way it would be organised.

The first meeting of the Volunteer group took place on February 12, 2012. My dear colleagues Marina Theofilou, Vally Hatzibuya, Amalia Apostolou and Alexandros Boutzonis as well as the supervisors Antonia Kostantinidou and Amalia Mavridou came to Xanthi for the initial coordination of the group; Stavroula Sechlidou and myself are based there. I was impressed at our swift preparation, at the ease with which we coordinated in reference to our action plan, dividing the roles and which pairs of therapists would co-ordinate the sub-groups, seeing that the number of volunteers had reached 40! Professionalism stood out once more through effortless synchronisation, through the experience and the willingness shown by all coordinators to volunteer our best! I felt happy and certain that with such a coordinating team we were in for substantial, rich work!

We found ourselves at the "Orpheus" Hotel on that cold Sunday morning, with 31 out of the 40 group members. I looked across everybody's faces, sat in a big circle, and was greatly moved by seeing familiar faces... people I had worked with at the Association, friends, co-workers; all of them with a common goal, to learn more so that they could give something back in return! The process that followed flowed painlessly and it was beautifully structured... the introduction, getting to know one another, the rules and limits, break-times and dividing into subgroups. When we once again came together in the big circle, there were five daisies on the floor, reflecting each sub-group's work and responding to the question about what volunteering meant for them: each



member's uniqueness was there, in the wide range of diverse answers. Some of the questions the volunteers answered concerned their motives and their fears. As early as the first meeting there had been a common piece of work that connected the group and raised their initial concerns, satisfaction and difficulties. Group members shared their impressions from the meeting and we all promised to meet again at the next meeting on the March 31!

It was an important and moving experience which brought together many of my dear colleagues; it was an opportunity for us to work together! It was also an important event for my town: through this effort the Association, with the valuable help of volunteers, will be in a position to help people who truly need it. I feel proud of being a member of the Gestalt family, as our joint action and creativity bring us all the closer to new journeys!

I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. May we keep up the good work.

Marina Katsikidou
Psychologist, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Graduate of the Gestalt Foundation

collabotation with the Infirmary of Palea Penteli

As a part of the Gestalt Foundation's voluntary community action and in conjunction with the practical training of 3rd year Athens trainees, on September 2011, a collaboration scheme was launched with Palea Pendeli Infirmary (orphanage).

For the time being, this collaboration involves establishing and running three support groups for volunteers and one support group for the staff.

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