



# Gestalt NEWS Foundation

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- > page **2** **editorial**
- > page **3** **INTRODUCTION TO THE MUNICIPALITY OF MOSCHATO DAY MEETING (PROGRAMME, SPEAKERS)**
- > page **4-5** **DAY MEETING -SOCIETY & THE INDIVIDUAL -THE ELDERLY**
- > page **6-8** **DAY MEETING -ADDICTION -making CHANGES**
- > page **9** **GESTALT AT THE YMCA**
- > page **10,11** **FREE EXPRESSION**
- > page **12** **FOUR-DAY WORKSHOP**



***“Creatively approaching the vital concerns of the community”***

**GESTALT MEETING**

**16/2/2014**

**AT THE MUNICIPALITY OF MOSCHATO TAVROS**

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## Editorial

**O**ne year later, I am once again sitting in front of a

white screen. Such a long time has passed since the last issue. Not for lack of news, events or activities at Gestalt Foundation. There have been many and important ones: dozens of talks, seminars and events with many participants. Yet, there has been no reporting and this, the lack of participation on the part of our community, has caused me great concern. Very few texts have arrived for the newspaper. What has caused me even greater concern is that there have been no questions. Very few people have asked me, "Will the newsletter come out?"

I am starting to wonder if there is any point to having this form of communication, since communication needs two parties to exist. Otherwise, it is a monologue... So perhaps I/we must accept that there is no point in having this form of communication for the Gestalt Foundation community. And I intend to discuss this with my partners at the next opportunity.

For the time being, you have in your hands Issue 19 of this informative newsletter, the greater part of which is dedicated to the recent one-day meeting organized by Gestalt

Foundation in cooperation with the Municipality of Moschato-Tavros, on "Creatively approaching the vital concerns of a community".

So I would like to add to the concerns the matter of participation in what we experience and co-create together.

Here it is then... with concern! And wishes for a beautiful Spring!

Adonia Konstantinidou 2014

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**Antonia Konstantinidou, M.Sc. Clinical and Social Psychology A.U.Th. Gestalt Therapist, Trainer and Therapy Supervisor. Cofounder of the Gestalt Foundation Training and Psychotherapy Centre. Accredited member of the Association of Greek Psychologists and the European Association of Gestalt Therapists (EAGT). Founding member of the Hellenic Association of Gestalt Therapy.**

I have been working in therapy with adults and groups of adults for 16 years. For the last ten years I have been focusing on psychological support for individuals with long term illnesses, as well as with training volunteers.

## ONE-DAY MEETING OF THE GESTALT FOUNDATION AT THE MUNICIPALITY OF MOSCHATO-TAVROS

programme - speakers

On February 16, 2014, a one day-meeting was held at Tavros City Hall, organized by the Gestalt Foundation in cooperation with the Municipality of Moschato-Tavros, titled "Creatively approaching the vital concerns of the community". Running from morning until early evening, Gestalt therapists and trainees of the Gestalt Foundation provided a chance to local residents to be informed on and discuss about important questions of our times. Unfortunately we cannot present all interesting presentations here; however, in order to give you a flavour, we will provide the descriptions as mentioned in the programme of the one-day meeting, information on the speakers and a selection of excerpts.

### "Society and the Individual"

**Despina Balliou, M.Sc. Consulting Psychology, Gestalt Trainer & Supervisor, member of the EAGT, holder of the ECP. Founding member of the Gestalt Center for Psychotherapy and Training.**

### "Dialogue as a Right of Coexistence and Cooperation in the parent-child relationship"

Our goal is how to define at this point in time, as citizens of a local community (adults and children), concepts such as relationship, dialogue, right, obligation, respect, diversity, solidarity, using examples from everyday stories. We are going to refer to relationships within family and school each one of us with the skills

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we are equipped with and the obstacles we are facing.

**Dora Loukides:** *Psychologist (BSc UOA) specialised in School Psychology (MSc Professional Training in Educational Psychology University of London) & Gestalt therapy graduate.*

**Anna Mertzani:** *She studied at the Department of Pre-school Education of the UOA and continued her post-graduate studies on "Child Care, Law and Practice" at Keele University, UK. Her first children's novel titled "I have the right to tell a story" was published by Apopeira Publications in 2011 and approved by the Ministry of Education as appropriate teaching material for schools, so that pupils' awareness on Children's Rights issues could be raised. Ms. Mertzani is an external partner in the "Erevnites" (Researchers) supplement of "Kathimerini" newspaper.*

**Antigone Orfanou:** *A qualified psychologist (BSc (Hons) Psychology), she later followed post-graduate studies specialising in School Psychology (MSc Professional Training in Educational Psychology) in the UK and received the title of Chartered Educational Psychologist. She is a Gestalt therapist and supervisor and a member of the EAGT. She trained in the "Developmental somatic approach" model of Ruella Frank at the Gestalt Institute in N. York.*

**"A healthy mind in a healthy body"**

Thoughts, feelings and beliefs play a major role when painful symptoms and illnesses are presented in the body. Correspondingly, if the body is weighted down by bad habits, such as an unhealthy diet, a sedentary lifestyle, substance abuse, etc., then mind clarity is affected.

Understanding and respecting the inextricably linked body-mind whole can liberate us from daily difficulties and chronic physical and mental suffering.

**Anetta Alexandridi:** *She holds a BSc in Psychology and has also been trained in Gestalt Therapy. She works privately as a therapist in individual and group sessions. She is also a trained yoga instructor with a special interest in psychosomatic health. She is an accredited Stress Management consultant with the British Stress Consultancy. She has worked in medical and psychological research and continues to work in academic research programmes.*

**"Illness: Redefining life through pain."**

Illness is a condition that causes people psychological and physical changes and losses. Feelings experienced include pain, disappointment, anger, and others. On the other hand, however, the experience of an illness is an opportunity for the person who is ill to redefine their lifestyle and way of thinking, as well as to find the true meaning of their life.

The goal of this speech is to bridge these two opposing views of illness.

**Katerina Didaskalou:** *She graduated from the Panteion University Psychology Department. She is training in Gestalt therapy (2<sup>nd</sup> year), at the Gestalt Foundation, Therapy and Training Centre. She has worked as a volunteer at the "Chamogelo Tou Pediou" (The Smile of the Child) Association for two years in the Support Department for Children with Health Problems (Creative Occupation at the "Agia Sophia" and "Aglaiia Kyriakou" hospitals). From 2011 to date she has been working at*

*the K.E.F.I. Association of Cancer Patients, Friends and Doctors of Athens, as a Psychologist.*

**"The Elderly: Bridging the gap"**

"I have stood where you are standing, and you will stand where I am now". And where I finally meet you... where you finally meet me. What scares me when seeing you... what stands in the way of you seeing me. We are inviting you to discuss relationships, in an attempt to create a bridge for us all to meet.

**Costas Michaelides:** *He studied at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and graduated from the Forestry School. During his career he has changed subjects and devoted himself to the science of Psychology. He is a graduate of TEESSIDE COLLEGE, Counselling and Psychological Science. He is a Gestalt Therapist, a member of the E.A.G.T., and the H.A.G.T. He practises at his personal office on Ag. Dimitriou Street, holding individual, group and couples' therapy and counselling sessions.*

**Stathis Tryfonopoulos:** *He holds a BSc (Hons) in Psychology (University of Northumbria at Newcastle) and an MSc in*



*Psychology & Health (Stirling University of Scotland). He is a graduate of the Gestalt Foundation in Gestalt Psychotherapy. He has many years of experience in working with the elderly, people with dementia, as well as with carers, at Care Units for the Elderly and at Day Centres. In 2005 he worked at the Day Centre for patients with dementia in Tillicoultry, Scotland, of Alzheimer's Scotland. Since 2009, while working with dementia patients, he has also been working privately as a therapist at the "En-Dia-Fero" Psychotherapy & Expression Centre. In February 2013 he returned to Aktio as the Head of the Psychosocial Department, also undertaking duties as an Assistant Director.*

**"Addiction: A circle of wrong answers"**

- Little Prince: Why do you drink?
- Drunk: I don't remember. I drink to forget.
- Little Prince: Forget what?
- Drunk: I don't remember. I am so ashamed.
- Little Prince: And why are you ashamed?
- Drunk: I am ashamed of drinking.

(Excerpt from *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupry)

"Addiction offers a paradoxical solution to psychological pain and aims at bringing pleasure. In the end, however, it leads to a situation where negative consequences outnumber any immediate and temporary gains".

Continued on page 4



Continued from page 3

In this presentation we are trying to understand the function and vicious circle of different forms of addiction, as well as the extent to which they concern us all.

**Maria Tselepi:** *She is an ATh Psychologist, MSc in Addiction Psychology and Treatment, London Metropolitan University, a graduate of Gestalt Therapy training, working for the "Alternative incarceration Pilot Programmes for violators users of illegal drugs" at OKANA.*

**"The familiar friend and the unknown enemy"**

*Who is familiar and who is a stranger to us in our society? Which are the familiar parts and which the unknown parts of ourselves? How similar are we to each other when faced with what is different?*

**Alexia Ioanna:** *She studied Psychology at Panteion University. She has trained in the Gestalt therapy method (Gestalt Foundation) and in Clinical Diagnosis and Evaluation (Athenian College). She has worked as a volunteer in various contexts, such as the "Together for Children" Support Line, at the "Estia Constantinoupolis" Home for the Elderly, at the Penteli PIKPA (staff support team) and the Multi-Clinic of the Municipality of Cholargos Papagou. Until recently she worked at the Iatriki Paremvasi NGO, as a psychologist at foreigners' detention centres, while currently she is working at the Babel Day Centre, providing psychological support to torture victims; she also has a private practice. At the same time, she is one of the volunteer coordinators of the support team for the Greek National Association against Epilepsy, in the context of its cooperation with the Association of Gestalt Therapists.*

**"Art as an aid to deal with adversities and to face negative circumstantial consequences"**

Apart from the obvious "help to the soul" provided by art, there are extensions that relieve and have beneficial consequences on daily life. Our goal is to detect the ways in which we can, either as "consumers" or as "producers", enter, through art, processes that allow us to develop strong defences against the current or general life difficulties.

**Giorgos Diplas:** *Pg.Dip. in PCA, Gestalt trainer, therapist and supervisor, member of the E.A.G.T. (European Association for Gestalt Therapy), holder of the ECP (European Certificate of Psychotherapy)*

## GESTALT ONE-DAY MEETING

# 1 Society & the individual

Despoina Balliou

**W**e are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a world that is immersed in change, troubled by intense conflict, tension and social discrimination, even frequent attacks of modern technology against the natural environment. As Anthony Giddens put it, 15 years ago, "we live in a world of constant changes that affects almost every aspect of our lives. For better or for worse, we are moving towards a global world order which nobody fully understands, of which, however, we are experiencing the results. Something that did not exist before is being created: A globalized society, the outline of which we cannot yet see clearly. Many of us feel controlled by powers over which we have no power". This control, confusion and deep pressure is something we encounter on a daily basis in our work as therapists.

On a daily basis we encounter the pressure of a maniacal economic system, the overwhelming results of which are fear, concern, desperation, stress, rage, violence and, sometimes, resignation. Initiatives by governments or businesses do not take account of or responsibility for the potential damage or negative consequences on citizens' lives. It is, therefore, no coincidence that phenomena such as depression, alcoholism, addiction, as well as all kinds of racism or aggressive extremism exist in our society.

But is it solely our economic system that causes all this? Definitely not!

At present we are experiencing a circle of constant social changes and fast transformations; demanding educational standards, bombardment from the media, and many different "realities", changes in place and time, people moving and communicating non-stop: mobile telephones, e-mails, social media networks, etc. All of this is, in the end, part of a collective reality in which we are trying to manage our existence. So, our effort to find meaning in this relationship between society and the individual is much more complicated than it used to be.

People are social beings and this means that they have an indomitable natural urge and desire to live in connection to others. As we say in Gestalt therapy theory, they have the need for autonomy, for freedom, on the one hand, and the need for connecting with people on the other.

[...] When we speak of society, we speak of a "whole". The individual is **both** a social factor **and** a social product.

The relationship between society and the individual is comparable to the relationship of the body and its various parts. The body and its parts are dependent on each other: neither can exist without the other. [...] Our social activities construct, form our social world and, at the same time, they are constructed by it. Any behaviour by an individual is a social action. Through the relationships in community, in society, people grow and create. They create society and societies create individuals, and so on and so forth. The Aristotelian concept: "the unmovable mover", made the unique and dynamic relationship of people with the environment more specific. All actions and feelings of the individual are interactive social actions.

Thus, Aristotle, who is considered the father of psychology, leads us by the hand down the difficult path of the quest for happiness, which means that our life moves towards completion as a "whole"!

Happiness is not a momentary realisation, but, rather, a succession of activities throughout our life, during our entire life, dedicated to what has value according to virtue.

## AT THE MUNICIPALITY OF MOSCHATO TAVROS

16/2/2014

However, we are not born with predetermined action guidelines. We are obliged to recognise them, create them, choose them. [...]

So, as social beings, we seek, through relationships, for healthy human virtues, which according to Aristotle are:

Belonging, friendship, knowledge, Justice, Politics (which includes Democracy and participation in managing the public affairs of the State).

How do we experience relationships in our society? [...]

Up until 20 years ago what was difficult was to sustain relationships. At present it is difficult for someone to feel oneself within a relationship. At present we suffer from a lack of solid ground, as there is no sensitivity regarding the need for roots, the relationship grounding, grounding in the experience of contact. At present, we need to support the need for relationships. That is why we are together today, to share some important issues that concern us greatly in the difficult conditions we are living in, concerning our relationship with our own self and our relationship with others.

We will explore the concept of dialogue between parents and children; we are inviting you to a meeting to bridge the gap with the elderly; we will explore our relationship with our body, our mind, our health and illness. We will try to understand the vicious circle of addiction, we will question the meaning of friend and foe and,, in the end, we will detect the vehicle of art as an aid in dealing with difficult situations. We want your participation, your questions, your experiences, perhaps... [...]

Although we could say that our social life is more like a prison than a



framework of dialogue and freedom, this is no reason for us to insist that every prison is indeed just that when we look at it that way, without making some effort to explore the space it provides for freedom.

What we have to do is trust in our own strength, our ability for contact that makes us human and that gives us the opportunity to contribute to the daily efforts to change society wherever there is space for "me" and "you", our diversity, as well as our weaknesses and limitations.

I firmly believe that when we work for equal relationships, which safeguard our need both to belong and to be free, with creativity and adaptability, we contribute towards a more peaceful future of cooperation and dialogue between society and the individual.

## 2 | The Elderly

*Kostas Michaelides, Stathis Tryfonopoulos*

Let us begin by hearing the words of the proverb...

**"I have stood where you are standing, and you will stand where I am now".**

One proverb, two people. You and me. I am talking to you. I am old and you are young. I am here now and you are there now. I used to be there, too. Someday, you will come here, too. When I was there you didn't even exist. When you come here, I will not exist. I was alone and you will be alone. What about together? Will we not be together? Can we not meet now? I am sad at these thoughts. Sorrow... sadness... this is what I feel... And what do I think? "Wow, will we never meet, I, the old one, and you, the young one?" And I am troubled. I feel fear. I long for something. I long to meet you. And this longing fills me with tension, it unsettles me. [...] Distance is time. The time that separates us. [...] My own time flows slowly. You see,

there is not much left for me to do. And I may not do much, but I think about many things. I have many hours for thinking, young man. There are times when I think of my journey. [...] How fast time has passed!!![...] And you? Where are you now? I see you searching, struggling to find time. You have surrounded yourself with this technology. It saves you time. The result is that you are being surrounded by plans you cannot execute, meetings you cannot attend, programmes you cannot materialize, and deadlines you cannot keep. This is repeated non-stop, over and over again. [...] You are afraid, young man. You are afraid you might spend your entire life chasing chimeras. And that you'll wake up old and helpless. [...] Time is the great question. Do we have the courage to approach the great question of time from the depths of our heart? [...] The mind turns it into a problem. And searches for a solution. And cannot find it, and keeps searching. [...]

**I look at you...**

Wrinkled, hunched over... shrunk. Little or no hair, white and weak or screaming of dye. Wrinkled hands trembling. A body screaming..." [...] And I feel fear at this picture. I do not want to see it. I do not want it to happen to me. I am disgusted... [...] Standing before this picture, all I can do is interpret. [...]

**I look at you...**

I see the firmness and strength of your body. I see the glimmer in your eyes. Your speed, your steady gait. It is true, sometimes you seem arrogant to me. Your obstinacy. The decisions you immediately want to turn into action. You think you know it all, you have learnt everything... You don't listen... Do what you want... It's your own head on the line.

## GESTALT ONE-DAY MEETING

Other times I look at you and think that I should help you.

[...] I must not become a burden to you. But it is a burden to me that I MUST be able to support you and it is an even greater burden not being able to tell you that I need you, too...

[...] Like in a game of tennis, we send the ball back at each other. We communicate only with what our stereotypes define.

[...] In this way we do not see each other. We only focus on our own interpretations. [...]

Everything that exists is a now. A now that is floating around, cut off from the course of our existence. We realize our self in phases. Child, Young Person, Elderly. We lose the sense of continuity of our whole self. So how could we possibly communicate with people who are in a different stage of life when we have forgotten and we cannot experience our own self during our existence? We observed that our interpretations and stereotypes stand in the way of deeper and more meaningful contact. Perhaps if we stand and look at our self in a different stage of our journey, that could help us question these stereotypes and experience the continuity of our existence.

I look at you in our living room. Sitting in your armchair. You have lost your hair. You are not wearing glasses. You are wearing a jumper, a grey pair of trousers and black shoes. You are smoking. I see you... Incredible, I'm still smoking, I think to myself... I stand in front of you... I talk to you and see you. Your voice is my voice. You speak to me... you ask about me, you want to make me feel comfortable. It is important for me to make people feel at home. I see it in you, too. I see it in us. It exists as long as I do. Gradually... ever so slowly, behind this foreign body, I start to recognize myself. I complain as much as you do. I feel as much stress as you do. And in the end we have the same needs. Companionship security acceptance. The only difference is the means we use to meet them. At present I feel safe having a job. Securing my daily needs. Quality of life is to have a means of transport so as to feel even more independent and free. There, I feel safe for still having my pension, while quality of life means being able to go to the toilet unassisted... so that I may feel free and independent. The need, however, is the same... in the then... in the now... in the afterwards.

I observe your space... I see a load of familiar objects. It was always difficult for us to separate ourselves even from objects. I see you looking at an old photograph. It's me... It's me in the end-of-year picture from kindergarten. We both look at it as though we're trying to re-enter it. Don't try to remember... I will help you with that. We are a child... 5 years old... What an anxious day it was. Keeping our uniform clean. Staying clean while playing.



And then the stress and embarrassment of standing in front of the camera.

I feel a tightening in my heart. I feel it, too. We felt the same thing, then. We meet, the three of us, after years, experiencing the same anxiety, the same embarrassment, the same stress. What has changed in the now? Emotion. The emotion hidden in the realization, with our mind and body and feelings, that I, you, and that child are all one. There are many differences. Immediately visible: height, weight, body type, voice. There are even more similarities. Feelings, thoughts, ideas, habits, obsessions, needs. I came to meet you, I watched you, I observed you. However, I felt that I was missing something; something stood in the way of my experiencing it with you. And what I was unable to do using reasoning, the child in the photographed managed with his look. He stirred our deeper emotions... he brought us into contact with our shared journey, with the difficulties and joys of that journey. It did not remind us of them, it encouraged us to experience them in the now and brought us into contact with our deeper similarities, not our differences. So we met... by integrating the feeling of continuity, that deep emotion. I would like to thank that child, you tell me. Thank it... for still being here after all these years, even though we forgot it in time. I tell you, let's say it together. So he can hear us both... So we can hear ourselves. So that this meeting can end with a feeling of union/being united.

Years have passed, much has changed and even more has stayed the same. A proverb discourages us from encountering each other, and another proverb reminds us how similar we are: 'The wolf, though old, with matted fur, hahs changed neither his opinion, nor his head'.

# 3 Addiction

## A cycle of wrong answers

*Maria Tselepi, Giota Skandami*

**T**he word "addiction" touches each one of us in a different way. Although addiction as an emotional state is, to a certain extent, healthy and necessary, above a certain point, even a healthy looking addiction hides and harbours some pathology. Without the concept of addiction, we would not enter relationships - we would deny deeper connections to other people. In the early stages of life, the dependence of the infant awakens in the mother the feeling of responsibility for the survival of this completely dependent creature...

As parents undertake certain responsibility in relation to what follows, they also create an unavoidable conflict which they will have to resolve. They

decide if they will bring into the world a living creature which they will literally feel is an extension of themselves. At the same time, however, they also need to support it so that it can become a whole and separate individual...

Human relationships are necessary for an individual's healthy psychological balance. No one is self-sufficient. In reality, we are all "co-dependent". We need others in many different ways...

Our ability to establish relationships and connect at a deeper level incorporates in its ingredients both the concept of autonomy and that of co-dependence. We constantly seek to strike a balance between these two tendencies, the creative combination of which is a prerequisite condition for a healthy existence that allows our commitment to others, to the social whole. Relationships, contact, can only occur between separate individuals, which always demand independence and always risk imprisonment in union. For some the experience of a relationship, of contact with oneself and the other, may be threatening. In this case, the individual has not experienced recognition, acceptance, respect for his own separate existence, their feelings, their needs and their desires... Perhaps the absence of limits and guidance during childhood created a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty... In some cases one may have experienced neglect, violence and abuse.

IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF MOSCHATO TAVROS 16/2/2014

## AT THE MUNICIPALITY OF MOSCHATO TAVROS

16/2/2014

Εάν αποτέλεσμα το άτομο μαθαίνει να κρύβει και να αποφεύγει τα συναισθήματα του δεν έχει πραγματική συνείδηση του ποιος είναι και τι πραγματικά χρειάζεται. Δυσκολεύεται να εμπιστευτεί και να ζητήσει στήριξη από το περιβάλλον. Βιώνει μοναξιά, άγχος, κατάθλιψη, ανασφάλεια, κατωτερότητα, αναξιοσύνη, αίσθηση ότι δε μπορεί να αγαπηθεί.



As a result of the above, individuals learn to hide or avoid their feelings. They have no real understanding of who they are and what they really need... They experience loneliness, stress, depression. They create a feeling of personal identity that is dominated by insecurity, feelings of inferiority, inadequacy or a feeling that they cannot be loved.

Addiction can thrive on this background. For many years, the term addiction referred to the use of psychoactive substances, substances that affect the psychological functions of users and change their mood. These days, however, it seems that people are increasingly resorting en masse to both the abuse of psychoactive substances - legal or illegal, hard or soft - and other non-pharmaceutical addictions, such as dependence on the Internet, gambling, overeating, bulimia, various types sexual behaviour, television, over-consumption, etc. ...

But why is it that more and more people in this day and age are searching for new ways to escape reality, whether personal or social? The phenomenon of addiction in humans, whether it is addiction to substances or to behaviour patterns or situations, is multi-faceted and influenced by numerous factors... The current climate of fluidity, uncertainty, disillusionment, unemployment, poverty, indifference and the collapse of values, creates radically stressful conditions, which definitely contribute to the rapid increase in the number of people searching for an artificial paradise... As you can tell from the above, the emergence of addiction is never random. There are always reasons, personal, familial, socio-political, which interact to form the context of addiction...

So what is addiction?

"Addiction offers a paradoxical solution to psychological pain and aims at bringing pleasure. In the end, however, it leads to a situation where negative consequences outnumber any immediate and temporary gains."

Addiction starts off as a survival strategy, since it is an effort to find some meaning in life. Progressively, however, it establishes itself and develops: excessive occupation with the object of one's addiction replaces the time used for social activities and individual growth. The place of weak social links is slowly replaced by addiction. Gradually, addiction stands in the way of daily life, quality of life, health and personal growth of the individual. It takes on a pathological character.

There are some common features in all forms of addiction. The use or abuse of the object of addiction is carried out in a compulsive, impulsive or ritualistic fashion. It also negatively affects an individual's functionality at all levels, pushing them towards gradual abandonment of all important familial, professional, social and other obligations. In the end, in all forms of addiction, use continues even after the knowledge of its catastrophic consequences.

In the end, preserving the addiction becomes the primary goal, displacing all other important aspects of life. It is the nature of addiction to ultimately eradicate all other life...

Essentially, what people experience during addiction, could be summarised in one phrase: "I could not live without you". Is it really an addiction when this phrase characterises the way we relate to people? This way of relating is called co-dependence. Co-dependence is similar to any other addiction, the only difference being that the "drug" is a specific group of people or a specific person... The argument is always, "but if I love someone and I love them wholeheartedly, isn't it a certainty that I will not be able to live without them?" In reality, a healthy relationship of love includes both one's self and the other. The co-dependent party is so preoccupied, trapped in the other's control, that they lose themselves, their contact with their own emotions, needs and desires.

Can this dependent behaviour really change? Despite the common denominator of addictions, each person expressing a pathological addiction has a separate and unique story that led them to it and that makes them unable or unwilling to get away from it. In therapy one could understand their personal story, come into contact with their real needs, in order to work towards solutions that originate within themselves and, therefore, be more appropriate...

In closing, we would like to mention a phrase of Jorge Bucay which, for us, includes a healthy way of existing, and which has touched us:

*"This is self-dependence. Knowing that I need other people, that I am not self-sufficient, but that I can take this need with me, I can tolerate it, until I find what I want, the relationship I am looking for, something to support me. Love..."*

## 4 making changes

with the Use  
of the Existent and Non- Existent in Gestalt Therapy

Giorgos Diplas, Pg. Dip. in PCA,  
Gestalt trainer, therapist, supervisor, holder of ECP.

**W**hen one resorts to a mental health professional, it is fair to say that they are looking for a change or a shift, either from dead-end and damaging behaviour patterns or from intensely negative or even torturous emotional entrapment. Our goal is to explore how it is possible to realize such a shift.

Existent and Non-Existent is the proportional Absolute:

[... "it is the unity of being and not being", while "Real is becoming rather than being" (Kostas Alexiou, *Philosophy and Heraclitus*)], where the Absolute has the meaning of the Whole, the Complete/Integral Non-Fragmented Human, who is constantly in a process of becoming or change. In the Gestalt approach we focus on these fundamental points.

> No change can occur out of nowhere or nothing.

> The concept of "to change", by definition, means the transformation of something pre-existing (object, situation, phenomenon, symptom) into something new, different.

> i.e. night comes because day exists, illness begins in health and the vice-versa, etc.

> When there are reasons to pursue a change in our life, we are obliged to start from what holds true at that moment as existent.

> However, what holds true is often painful, we cannot handle it, and so we tend to pass it by and visualise our “miraculous” teleportation to a condition of relaxation or, even, euphoria/as euphoria.

> This is unattainable because it fragments the dialectic unity of the Existent and Non-Existent.

Existent and Non-Existent is something proportionally Absolute or Whole Absolute: [... *“is the unity of being and not being”, while “True is becoming rather than being”* (Kostas Alexiou, Philosophy and Heraclitus)]

> If we transfer this Absolute to what concerns us, and in the sense of the “Existent and Non-Existent” mentioned, we have the unity of life and death. Recognising this condition takes on the form of being aware of our unique and mortal nature.

> According to Laura Perls, this is the main human problem: because it is terribly difficult to accept mortality, we often tend to focus on uniqueness. This lopsided view, exactly because it inhibits the unity mentioned above, has side effects: at times we overvalue and at other times we undervalue our own uniqueness, our very existence.

> On their own, undervaluing and overvaluing would not have serious consequences if the former were not accompanied by a vertical drop in self-esteem and self-worth, and the latter not accompanied by a feeling of exaggerated importance and megalomania.

> When applying this approach in Gestalt therapy we stress immediate awareness and engagement in the Existent and Non-Existent, not in the sense of life and death, but, i.e., with the problem as it appears and the fantasies or expectations the interested party has, restoring the unity of the Existent and Non-Existent in the here and now; this works cumulatively as the necessary support for a constant creative adjustment in the long term.

#### ART AS AN AID TO DEAL WITH ADVERSITIES AND TO FACE NEGATIVE CIRCUMSTANTIAL CONSEQUENCES

Apart from the obvious “education of the soul” art offers, there are extensions with relieving and beneficial consequences in daily life. We will attempt to detect/identify the ways in which we can, either as “consumers” or as “producers”, to enter a process which will allow us to manage the difficulties of our times and life in general, using art as our vehicle.

The following text, which has been extended and supplemented, was a speech delivered in the framework of an event organised by the Municipality of Moschato-Tavros.

In an attempt to approach a definition of Art, not from an academic or intellectual but from a practical point of view, we notice the common feature of transformation or change, of an object, a phenomenon, a situation, a stimulus into something different. Works of art start off as things undifferentiated from something existent that refers to the factors mentioned above, which lead to something else, regardless of their degree of similarity to what comprised their starting point.

The process of change presupposes, as a means, the engagement/involvement of an active subject in some movement, some activity. With this activity this person encounters and participates in the universal process of change, universal movement or flow; in other words, this individual is moving in parallel to the universal/cosmic flow and, because of this, he/she is in experiential contact with the present and the eternal, because the present contains the whole of the past and the future with its infinite possibilities and limitations.

Something transforming is the Present, while something becoming is Eternal. But individuals themselves are also in a constant process of transformation, of change.

Therefore, the process of the change of an object, phenomenon, etc. is harmonised with the inherent process of the change of an individual. This movement of the individual produces a beneficiary sense of communion (meeting/participating) because it tunes in with ecumenical/cosmic movement, with realisation, since it tends towards the holistic formation of new wholes and relief. At this point we draw upon Heraclitus who said: “by changing, everything rests”.

What exactly does that mean? In order for there to be relief, its opposite must first exist, i.e. some tiring condition, misfortune, “pressure”. This



“pressure” that an individual experiences when faced with their potential engagement in the process of change is nothing but anxiety, the term Sartre used to describe one’s experience when faced with freedom, meaning the freedom of choice. In this case, freedom of choice is whether the individual is to engage in the process of change or not. If they choose not to become engaged/involved, then what they choose is preservation, maintenance, risk avoidance. However, knowing from experience that their own inherent process of change is in operation, “they know” that they are inevitably being led to their fatal end, which may cause fear, disappointment, discouragement, frustration and many other not easily manageable feelings. In avoiding implication the dominant type of thought is “what is the point of doing anything since this is the ultimate result?”

It may be nothing of a coincidence that both rest and relief are expressions that traditionally and symbolically refer to death. If the individual chooses to become involved, we still have the same course that leads to the same end.

The two options are, therefore, integrally connected with loss. This is where Heraclitus guides us: “whatever you might do, you will lose”. It goes without saying that loss is also integrally connected with gain. But it is no coincidence that the “Dark One” is not mentioned anywhere in gain. So where is it hidden?

These three states, namely, communion, realisation, relief are the content of creativity, or the “gates” through which creativity springs; they are the necessary and sufficient conditions through which creativity exists. However, when we speak of “engagement/involvement”, it is obviously unrelated to the three states mentioned above: it is not possible to “order” them or to choose them, so that creativity may spring.

Involvement/Engagement does not concern the work to be produced. So whose involvement is the profit we speak of hidden in?

Creativity is not the result of activity, it is not the final “product” produced, although the latter is connected to creativity. Ancient Greeks did not discriminate between art and craft, and, as it seems, they were right: creativity produces “works”, but these are not creativity itself. The difference between a work of art and a work of craft is the feeling, or, to be more precise, the subtle shades of feelings caused to the observer encountering the work. Both the artist and the craftsman can feel communion, fulfilment and relief during their activities.

The first conclusion from this is that creativity is not a structural element that someone has and someone else does not. The aptitude for different things may exist in people, but the creativity with which they will pursue their aptitude is an inherent feature that appears/emerges when one engages in the process mentioned. It is like saying, We are rather than We have creativity.

The second conclusion that arises is that, since creativity comes about with one’s involvement/engagement in its process, it has nothing to do with the work produced, i.e. it has no connection with any goal. On the contrary, the goal stands in the way of communion, fulfilment and relief, because the individual is “trapped” in expectations and fantasies, which results in becoming engaged/involved in an ideal target/goal somewhere in the future, instead of becoming involved with the process in the now.

We do not look forward to the future for a moment of happiness; “happiness” is the extroversion to take the present for granted and go into motion with it. From this viewpoint, a painter or a musician apply themselves on a daily basis on their respective subjects and develop them just like a farmer tills, sows and tends the land, a scientist researches hypotheses and a therapist works with the person in therapy in the present, without being concerned with the concept of therapy.



# The Gestalt Approach also present at the YMCA

The YMCA in Thessaloniki, in the heart of our city, has traditionally organised programmes to keep children creatively occupied at day care centres and sports teams, as well as educational programmes for adults: theatre, dance, yoga, martial arts, sewing, knitting, painting, jewelry, photography and many others.

It was 4 years ago when I encouraged the YMCA to add Gestalt method psychological support and therapy to the broad range of services and training it offers. My goal was to approach the city's audience using a different "entry point". To try and encourage more people to experience the gift of group therapy, particularly at a time when the social and financial crisis has immobilized and terrorized all of us, to a lesser or greater extent. Everything is collapsing and we are called to break the rules and find the courage to invent new ways to build bridges towards the new, towards the unknown.

At the YMCA I coordinate:

Annual Experiential Self-Awareness Groups: "Taking care of the child inside me". Closed Gestalt psychotherapy group.

10 2-hour meeting Parents' school: "Creating authentic relationships with our children". An open group for parents. It includes a theoretic background and then the parents have the opportunity to work as a group on the problems they face in their role.

Volunteer action for the Unemployed: "Every obstacle hides an opportunity"

The programmes for the unemployed titled: "Open Doors" were established 3 years ago and are offered to 150 jobless people every year. It is a programme based on visualisation and the availability and voluntary contribution of YMCA trainer-partners. The goal of all actions is to motivate the unemployed, to give them the opportunity to recognise their own potential or the potential within their environment they are unaware of, to help them work in a group and create new relationships with individuals experiencing a similar situation.

For a second year we have instituted a round of open psychotherapy training speeches for the public, at YMCA's small theatre. An audience of about 170 people has been formed who attend, thirsty for new ideas and new viewpoints. The titles and dates are included in the annual schedule of the Gestalt Foundation and the YMCA's activity list, and are posted on their respective websites.

This is more or less how, in time, another step has been made for Gestalt. It is true that, initially, I believed that this action would attract more people to the groups and that I would soon be able to invite colleagues or trainees from the Gestalt Foundation. Experience has once again proven that anything new needs time to trace its own story course.

So I am experimenting for the moment... The members of the public crossing the YMCA threshold are different from those who come to our offices. The former are mainly parents who come so as to provide something to their children, rather than to themselves. For parents it is very difficult to prioritise for themselves, especially when their income has dropped and their worries have risen. We need to establish the knowledge that at the YMCA there is something new: Group support and therapy. And what exactly is Gestalt therapy. In response to this need, I have

held 7 speeches this year.

Naturally, I am not alone - I think no member of the Gestalt Foundation family is alone - since I have the help of Antonia Konstantinidou and Katia Chatzilakou, who have been observing and creatively commenting on developments.

They responded to my invitation both years and honoured me with their energy and the wealth of their soul and art, and I thank them so much...

Antonia Konstantinidou spoke on: "JOY IN OUR LIFE!" "We forget to mention it, forget to study it, and yet joy is what takes us forward!" That is how she began, and all attendees, about 120 people - you couldn't fit any more in the tiny and completely inappropriate YMCA room - were surprised. She made due without a microphone, risking not being able to project the power point presentation she had prepared, with the audience literally surrounding her. She chose to creatively adapt, to speak of joy with affection, optimism and, naturally, joy. At the end of her speech a lively, spontaneous, wonderful discussion started. No one left the room until they were convinced they had heard or asked everything they needed to on the subject of joy. Nothing is obvious, especially when we are constantly discussing the anger we need to express, the fear we need to battle, the sorrow we need to drown when it is small so that it doesn't turn into fully blown depression...

So lets practise joy...

Antonia, I observed you intensely, and I noticed the audience smile with sorrow and sigh for the joy that had escaped them!

This year, on Thursday 15 May 2014 she will speak on "Sexuality as a form of relating according to Gestalt theory". Katia Chatzilakou also spoke on the subject of: "Forgive (con-chorus), Forgive (co-fit), Forgive... "in Medea's circle"..."

It was Holy Monday, we were at the small theatre of YMCA; Katia was at the microphone and people had slowly started arriving because there was a strike on. The speech referred to the need for forgiveness, for saying sorry. "Why should we study Medea? Because, who can forgive Medea? Can we forgive Medea's human nature or did she leave that behind when she killed her children, which were her life?" It was the introduction for the film that followed. A riveting film, it had us all glued to the screen - congratulations to those who inspired it and those who created it.

Forgiveness is a selfish act, because it concerns the person forgiving, not the person being forgiven. Forgiveness is a process, not momentary action. It releases energy, it stops one from picking at the wound in their heart, and allows us to move on... Enough with hating, fearing, asking for value and recognition from people who will never provide it to us. It is time to move on!

Dear Katia, always inventive and innovative. The audience was stunned for a few minutes after the speech, trying to realise what it had just heard and connect it to their own reality. It was definitely a speech that aroused pain, anger, desperation, while at the same time strengthened hope and allowed tears to flow. Since Medea, wise and all powerful, helped us acclimatize, and the chorus forgave her passion and desperation, perhaps we can make some room within ourselves for those who hurt us, in order to forgive ourselves... and move on with our lives, free! In any case, we are not goddesses to absolve others, we are humans and everything we do is human.

Marina Zisiadou Theofilou, Gestalt therapist and Homoeopathist

free  
expression

# One big Embrace

**In 2008, due to several instances of loss that I experienced through my cooperation with "I Agia Ekaterini" Cancer Patients' Association of Katerini & Pieria, as well as through my own personal experiences, this story was born. My goal was to describe the psychoemotional process experienced by a child during loss, while also keeping in mind the child's immediate environment (parents, friends, teachers...).**

Melina Makridou  
Gestalt Psychotherapist

**O**nce upon a time there was a little turtle called Photini\*. She lived in the forest at her grandparents' house, because her mom and dad were away.

You might be wondering why her parents were away.

Photini's dad was really ill. Something had happened to his shell and it was slowly cracking. So, along with her mother, they went to the great forest to ask for help from the wise wizard. Perhaps he could help heal her dad with his magic potions!

Photini wanted to see her parents so much!!! Very often she thought that maybe she had done something wrong and that's why her dad had got ill. At other times she thought that maybe her mom and dad would forget her and no longer love her, now that they were in the great forest. These thoughts and many others tortured Photini's mind. Every night she looked at the sky and asked the clouds and stars to bring her parents back.

And so the days went by...

One day, however, Photini came home early. Her grandparents did not hear her come in and she overheard them saying that her dad's health was getting worse.

She pretended not to have heard a thing. She went into her room and called her friends Anastasis, a he-lion, Angela, a she-tiger, Sophia, a she-butterfly and Love, a she-elephant\*\*. They all came as fast as they could. Photini started telling them everything she had overheard. In the end she told them that she was thinking of leaving, of going to find her mom and dad. Then Angela said that if she thought it was a good idea, she would carry her on her back and take her to her parents as fast as she could. Anastasis said he would join them, to protect them from the dangers they would encounter in the great forest, but then - he thought out loud - that it was not such a good idea. Love did not speak, she just listened. In the end she said "I agree! It is not a good idea! Let's think of a better idea all together!" They started thinking, until, suddenly, Angela's voice was heard. "I've got it!" And then she said: "Photini, get a piece of paper and a pencil! Since you can't go, you can write a letter to your parents and tell them everything you want to say, as though you were by their side!"

Meanwhile, Sophia, the butterfly, arrived, late as usual. She heard Angela's idea and went to get Grigoris\*\*, the pigeon, the fastest pigeon in the forest, to take the letter to Photini's parents. After they

all agreed that this was indeed a good idea, Photini started writing...

Dear Dad and Mum, I miss you so much! Every night I look at the sky and I ask the clouds and the stars to bring you back near me soon. Daddy! Mummy! I have so much to tell you that it will not fit in this letter... The only thing I can tell you now is that I love you and I thank you for being my parents! And if sometimes I get upset and say I don't want you, please, know that I don't mean it!

I send you my sweetest kisses and my greatest hug!

Grigoris, who had just arrived, took the letter and immediately flew high, to take the letter to Photini's parents.

That night, Photini felt that the love she had for her parents would never be lost....

The following day, before the sun had had a chance to rise properly, she was awoken by a persistent tapping at her window. "What is it?" she wondered and, before even finishing her sentence, she saw Grigoris and her heart started pounding. "God! Make it be news from dad and mum!" she whispered and she opened the window with trembling hands.

Her wish had come true and she found herself reading a letter from her dad.

She opened it with excitement and started reading it aloud.

My dearest daughter! What does it matter if your mother and I are far away? We think of you every day. We love you more than you can imagine, and we are very proud of you! Your love shines a light and warms our heart. The wise wizard is doing all he can to get me better, so that we may return by your side soon, but Photini, no matter what happens, I want you to know that we will always be together.

I send you my kisses and mum and I send you our greatest hug!

Photini would not put the letter down. She carried it with her for days and felt so happy...

After a few days, another great surprise was in store for her! Her mother returned! Photini ran to her, hugged her and started kissing her. "Mummy, mummy, mummy!" she shouted. After a short while she asked, "...Mummy, where is Daddy? Was he tired, is he asleep? Did the wise wizard not let him come? Tell me, Mommy, what happened?"

Her mum looked at her and calmly replied: "My darling Photini,

*Daddy is gone... The last thing he told me was that he loves us and that he will always be near us..."*

*Photini was not able to utter a word. She went to her room, locked the door and started crying. Her friends came, they told her to open the door so they could talk, but... she did not want to see anyone... for days on end she did not eat or drink. She almost got sick.*

*All those days, her mum was outside her door. She did not speak. The only thing she said was: "Darling Photini, if you do not go through sorrow, you cannot feel joy. I will be here for you when you ask for me". One night, in her sleep, Photini saw her dad in a dream telling her that he was very sad because he had been watching her all those days, locked in her room. She woke up, turned on the light and waited for dawn.*

*In the morning she apologized to her mum and... before she had had a chance to finish her phrase, her mum hugged her and explained that she should not apologize because we all feel pain and get sad for someone we love when they go. She gave her a sweet kiss and advised her to go and find her friends. "When we are sad, we need company, it soothes the pain... like when I give you honey. Friends are like honey in life. Go find them. They are waiting for you!"*

*And so they were! Photini went to find Anastasis, Angela, Sophia and Agapi to tell them what had happened.*

*At first none of them spoke. They just hugged her tenderly, each in their own way. If you looked at them from above, you would see a strange star being formed: Shine was in the middle and against her shell, softly, was Love's trunk, Anastasis' and Angela's tails and Sophia's little wing.*

*Angela wept in secret because she knew what it felt like... She quickly wiped away her tears and promised not to leave Photini alone, even for a moment. Sophia made the same promise, and since she had a practical mind, she decided to find a way to bring Photini's Dad to her dreams, as often as possible. And as Anastasis was looking for something funny to say, Love provided the solution! She was unable to hold back a tiny drop that was hanging from her trunk and she drenched Photini's little shell!!!*

*They all looked at each other and they started laughing out loud! They laughed for so long, that their eyes welled up with tears of laughter! None of them hid those tears! When evening fell, it found them playing and laughing and all the little stars watched them proudly and happily... one star more than all the others!!!*

*Since then, each time Photini was sad about her dad, she remembered the dream she had had. She looked at the sky, smiled, opened her arms and sent a great big hug, certain that her dad was hugging her back...*

*\*Photini means full of light, emitting light*

*\*\*Anastasis means Resurrection, Angela is the feminine for Angel, Sophia means wisdom and Agape means love in the broader sense of the word; Grigoris means fast, alert*

*Once upon a time  
There was me and there was you  
There was us and there was you  
And everyone thought they were  
The whole world, each one of them alone  
You and I and we and you became my world  
I came to together, I came to the here, I came to the now  
And the whole of time was there, at that very moment*

*I drifted into embraces old and new  
After conflict old and new  
Conflict with me, conflict with you  
And I managed to clash hiding from us  
Without observing me, without trying*

*How many selves in me, in you, in us and you  
I am all this at once and that looks like a threat  
Body of mine you heart is beating low  
As though the heart is trying to save itself through the stomach*

*Whirling around this poem  
As though hiding from something that's a shame  
As though I'm going round in circles once more  
And I hope the words will give me the sign  
What mean to say, where I mean to stand*

*Don't want a price, don't want to pay  
Don't want opinions, don't want more pain  
Don't want decisions and I choke up  
All I can tell you is I'm so many things all at once.  
All around me everyone and in the middle is the drop  
I've played this game so long  
It's tired me  
And I'm sorry  
For what I haven't seen, what I haven't heard,  
From me and you  
For what I have seen, what I have heard  
From both me and you  
From what you might have been and what I might have been  
That wasn't true.*

*And now I'll tell you what has had me confused a while now  
I've been confused I'm so many things at once  
I've been confused you're so many things at once  
I don't know what I should expect, nor where I should stand*

*And so I'm an electron  
Everywhere and nowhere  
And instead of deciding, I wander  
In the land where only suspicion is real  
The only thing that's real is what we can see, you and I  
And our other many selves  
In the before, the now and in the always  
But this is the land of never  
My dear self*

*Just for a moment I left the "ifs"  
More importantly I left the "as ifs"  
I left the "to me it seems"  
I left the "maybes"  
I opened to the "come this way" and I said hello  
And the drop became an avenue*

*And when I believed without searching for the truth  
I realized that truth is everywhere  
Not the unchangeably eternal  
But what is here  
When I feel and lose the 'I'.*

*Vasiliki Christodoulou  
Athens Gestalt Foundation Trainee*

## Correspondence

To this day the blue of the sea is in my eyes...  
Indeed, the four-day trip to Agria, near Volos, this year, seemed to be framed with water, with the fluidity of love, with a pervasive sexuality that reached the land.

I turn time back, just a week earlier, and bring to mind the moments and processes, the words and contacts that brought me closer to my personal quests and to meanings slowly crystallising. Who was I, who am I and who am I becoming? Just questions, words ending at question marks. Sometimes light and sometimes unbearable.

I am there, at the beginning of the four-day workshop, in the large "assembly room". I observe the laughter, the voices, the welcomes, the nervousness, the fatigue, and the embraces.

All trainee years together, trainers and Favorito, the coordinator-guest. His name and presence remind me of my first meeting with him, almost three years before, at the home-coming and I observe what is happening before me with a similar *home* mood. I see and hear with difficulty. Too many chairs block my point of view.

The coordinator's words are quiet. My heart is beating louder. My body is also telling me something, quietly, for the moment... I start to feel uncomfortable. Where is the *home* gone? This room is really big... It is very ambitious to start the four-day workshop with a full assembly and such deep work... It's a shame this work cannot reach the back rows... I think. And on the other hand, why don't I move forward, to hear and see better? I did not know then. Now I realise that my body was still resisting. It was too early for such a shift, too early to come closer. So be it. It's a good thing I heard it.

What love do we speak of? Of the one that *occurs* between individuals? How did I use to fall in love? How do I fall in love today? What is my need? When do I start to search for it and when do I lose it? And how does it occur/emerge in the end? Images come to mind of people that I crossed paths with, that I walked together with. At times alone, at others in pairs and on companionate journeys. Yes, for me love is lonely, deeply existential, with elements of creativity and inspiration. It is companionate, too, co-creation being its main structural element, along with composing a new picture, made with two brushes and with strokes of melancholy. "Am I

making my need a relationship?" Am I turning my relationship into a need? In the former case I see my expectation existing even before I have met the other person: let's fit together and find some peace. Let's finally put a full stop. In the latter, I recognise my unsatisfied need: a relationship that constantly gives birth to needs, the greatest one being that of satisfying them. I observe these two aspects, aspects of myself: they used to be at odds, but at present they have with interest and respect for each other. I am following a very personal process and I am staying with it.

My body whispers to me. I feel it rigid in some parts and decide to express it in words, so that it may become more manageable. I become a statue for the other person, a small winged Mercury in his hands. How available am I? What changes when the other person has the raw material and the inspiration? And what happens when our creative powers do not coincide? Touching and caring seem less and less this time. What happens now, that my body is blocked? I listen to it and express my commitment to care for this rigidity and favour the quality of my flexibility when coming into contact with others. Those I meet in the halls and hallways, in the closings and openings of life, against a backdrop of blue and the colours of the earth.

So where is love? Does it arrive as a gift from the other person? Am I carrying it with me and not aware of the fact? I met love in underground journeys, in transcendence courses that required effort and intensity in order to look real and be worth the trouble.

A sense of fatigue. I feel the need to stand up, I need a breath that will ground me. I carry love inside me, it is one of my constituent ingredients, of vital importance. It is found in motion and in rest. In a bittersweet sensation. In most everyday events I more easily pass it by. I need to do something with it and share it.

To be inspired... So that something can happen, something can stir the water in my body, give me the meaning for I started off seeking. "I want" and "I can" have grown apart, thankfully. They used to have one body and one voice. Now each one is a different pathway.

To be inspired. That's it. Three words. One wish. My ears listen, yes, they can listen. They are moved and make my eyes well up.

Thank you to everyone who gives me the opportunity to wonder and somehow continue to be inspired and fall in love.

Irene Koutela  
3<sup>rd</sup> year trainee Athens



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