

Testimony of a “groupe de partage » member from 2021 round

At first, I was rather skeptical. What good can this exercise do me? However, the intellectual approach intrigued me and I decided to give it a try. I was also encouraged by the fact that we worked in groups of 4. During the first session, I wanted to test the waters. The small group seemed very nice, the facilitator held the session well, neither too restrictive nor too permissive; it all gave me confidence. Therefore, I decided to play the game rigorously even though I was not sure of the outcome. I already knew from experience that several practices (yoga, meditation, breathing, repeating mantras) achieve their goal without an explicit explanation on why or how they do it, so I was ready to give this exercise a chance. I would like to talk about my experience by detailing 5 elements of this practice that stood out for me.

- 1- Looking for the event: This activity, which can last several days, is very important. It allows us to sift through the events of our history by trying to highlight those that have had an impact on our personality or on the course of our life, on our emerging self. What made me what I am? what made my life what it is? The reflection on the emerging self which takes place at this stage is a difficult and laborious process but a crucial one for the choice of the event and the rest of the process. We quickly realize that the negative events in our life are more salient than the positive ones. Moreover, we realize that even the positive aspects are more delectable when they avenge us for some negative aspects. This bias prompts us to counteract it by making a point of highlighting the positive aspects of our life in the past, present and future.
- 2- Sincerity in the narrative: the attitude of sincerity was essential for me. The will to deliver a part of our life with sincerity is liberating, especially when we will be listened to sincerely and without judgement. This combination of listening, non-judgment and non-discussion promotes sincerity. We are not inclined to embellish. Sincerity makes us free; and the more we feel liberated, the more sincere we tend to be. Sometimes I felt like I was vomiting the truth like poison to detoxify myself, to exorcise buried torments.
- 3- Strict instructions: going into details and respecting the 10 minutes. The instructions for the exercise specify that we must go into the details of the event. This turned out to be absolutely relevant. We need to go through the details in order to fully express our feelings. Generally, in everyday life, we are told to skip the details, because whoever listens to us finds them unnecessary; here the details of our story are required, the other participants will listen to them, in the same way that we will listen to theirs. This is a great opportunity. As for the 10 minutes limit, it is meant to keep out excessive details compelling us to abandon the unessential and focus on the heart of the matter. Above all, this approach allows us to see the event as it is without frills, like a photo or a filmed session.

4- Writing: Writing disciplines the chaos that jostles in our brain and helps us perceive it and present it as linear, logical and understandable. It materializes this cloud of ideas, emotions, feelings, regrets etc. which floats somewhere in us, it concretizes it in letters, in words, in sentences which lay there on the page, sentences which will be read, which will be listened to. I have reread and corrected my text often, not to fix the figures of speech, but to make sure that my thoughts will be understood without distortion and the words are true to the reality I am trying to relate. Because when reading, I will be the first to listen to my story. It has to match how I feel.

5- Reading and reciprocal listening, trust: Would writing alone have been enough? No, we need to say loudly what we have sought in the depths of ourselves, and we need witnesses to this; witnesses who do not discuss, who do not judge, who only listen. Our partners in the exercise listen to us with interest and empathy and we are grateful for that, so we reciprocate listening with interest and empathy, the way we wish to be listened to. We are here, mutual kind witnesses, witnesses of each other's experiences, which is very important. It should be noted here that the group composition was to the advantage of the exercise. What binds us at the start are what we call weak social ties: we know each other, we belong to the same institution, but our lives are not intertwined. Telling our stories every Thursday will not interfere, even unconsciously, in our daily life. However, thanks to our stories we knew each other better, we grew closer, we even became friends, dare I say. Friends, not shallow shopping girlfriends, but real friends, the kind who knows the soul and the experiences that the soul lived. Due to that, an atmosphere of trust emerged in the group. I believe this place of trust is the most important point of the whole exercise. It is this trust that was built over the sessions that allowed, for example, the volcano that was thundering and rumbling in our friend Maha's heart for 3 weeks to finally explode in hot lava and splendid colors during the fourth session. Those splendid colors, reflecting in the glass of wine that she raised to our health and especially to hers, moved us so much.

Finally, I can sum up my experience like this. An intense reflection on my life aiming to choose an important event that affected my personality and to approach it with sincerity, making it less chaotic by writing it clearly and rationally, giving it its true value. Then having the courage to read it out loud in front of witnesses, to throw it like a bottle into the sea, exorcising it if it is bad or proclaiming it to life if it is beautiful and be grateful for it. Having the courage to read it too if it involves new, daring, brave ideas. Displaying them to better assess them. Above all, listening with kindness to others; being their mirror as they are ours. This dynamic creates a place of trust where it is good to be and to indulge. The bad event loses its acuteness, in fact, it becomes a nice story; the happy event becomes a triumph. Overall, we see more clearly. All of this is liberating and makes you feel good.

The question I still ask myself is what happens next. Is the exercise designed for only 4 sessions?

P.S. My daughter faces a decisive choice in her professional life that distresses her. She is afraid of making a mistake. I found myself telling her that life is a series of experiences, good or bad. Each experience, whether good or bad, enriches our life. Any bad decision will be

recoverable. We have to enjoy life and all that it offers. Enjoy the ride!! I wonder if this new way of looking at life, which was unfamiliar to me, did not originate in the practice of our group.