

Malcolm's Lecture: 'Burps'

When Malcolm stood up to address the 'Sputnik's Hub' audience, his demeanour showed that he was well-used to engaging with groups...not only the children in his school, and their parents, but also with delegates at education conferences where he was well-known and highly regarded for his philosophy of actively using meditative techniques in the classroom, and for promoting *self-respect* - as described in the school brochure: *'not necessarily from good behaviour, perseverance and excellent work, but through a community ethos of 'no matter what...you are respected'*.

It was unusual for him to use notes, and as his fingers fiddled around a few lecture prompt cards he explained why he had them to hand: "It's a privilege for me to speak on behalf of The Mother...though I'd much rather be sitting there," he grinned, and pointed towards his usual seat, "listening to her calm and encouraging talks..."

He faltered for a moment, "No matter..." he regained composure, "She's with us in thought...and has been quite specific about what I should say..."

He cleared his throat and looked at his audience as though starting afresh, "Most of you have worked with The Mother and are familiar with the evening's topic, so I'm hoping this'll be a discussion: I'm certainly not in a position to 'lecture'..." he smiled uncertainly, "...I stumble in my efforts to, 'walk the talk' as she would say.

Nevertheless, preparing these notes with her has been enormously healing, and I'm sure that exploring her ideas will reinforce the wisdom for us all."

He glanced down at the cards and smiled, "As you know, The Mother has a way of using stories or neat sayings to make her point - in fact she's a perfect teacher! So you'll not be surprised that she suggested we should talk about BURPS!"

They laughed.

"Burps are mistakes and errors in our self-perception and in our reaction to others.

B.U.R.P.S. - an acronym for:

Betrayed

Unworthy

Responsible

Powerless

Separate

I'd like us to discuss each one, consider the mistakes we make, and think about ways to correct how we perceive ourselves with others.

Remember, I'm expecting you to chip in and help me out..." he grinned at Gabby, "I'm sure you will!"

"Why don't we start with a meditation?" Maria spoke up with her usual innocent impetuosity.

Malcolm immediately tucked his note cards into his pocket, placed his palms together and acknowledged her with a slight bow, "Thanks for keeping me in order, Maria! Of course, why don't we?"

He kept his hands together and closed his eyes, "Let's spend a few moments – as we've been taught - noticing our breath...watching the rise and fall of our abdomen...

Allowing thoughts to drift away...

Being still...

So that we're in touch with wisdom...

Then, as we focus on each breath...begin to silently repeat our familiar mantra:

Who Am I, Who Am I, Who Am I...

Stay with this focus for a couple of minutes...

...And now, open your eyes, and take a deep breath...

...Thank you, Maria...

So... Let's talk about 'burps'!

*The first one - feeling **Betrayed**." He paced in front of them, and then scanned their faces with a serious expression, "**Betrayal**. I'm the world's worst offender... In fact, I consider myself extremely fortunate that you – in this small community – have kept me in friendship and trust despite my betrayal of a loving wife and daughter through my affair and subsequent civil partnership with Harry; it's been a difficult journey...which continues as we seek forgiveness and peace."*

They sat in silence until Vanessa tentatively raised her hand to speak, "Isn't it up to us – the supposed victims - not to feel betrayed?"

He shook his head dismissively, "That's difficult for me to say when I'm the one who, in this instance, caused so much distress.

Everyone who has been betrayed faces a tangled mix of emotions, and expecting others to set aside the effects, as you suggest, seems a heartless shift of responsibility...though I do understand where you're coming from, and hopefully we'll come close to that outlook by the end of our discussion...

My situation was a three way complexity: I betrayed my family – when they learned of my deceit, when I revealed that my personality was not what they thought, when they had to adjust to a new way of living as a family, and when they had to face the reaction of others.

In the same way, members of the community and school faced betrayal because of me; my behaviour forced people into a position where they had to make philosophical decisions about my actions, and choices about trusting me.

*Then there was **my** betrayal of me: the secret liaison with Harry, my eventual 'coming out', and finally - had I chosen not to betray everyone else...I would have lived each day knowing I was betraying myself."*

He paused, "I didn't plan to speak so personally, but," he smiled weakly, "had I not done so, my talk would have been a whole new level of betrayal."

Vanessa raised her hand again, "I would think all of us respect your honesty...as well as your privacy...because, without trust and clarity we wouldn't be able to have a genuine spiritual discussion..."

Actually, your personal openness feels refreshing, and is helpful - especially for those of us who have felt similar feelings of betrayal...eventually finding compassion and love," she glanced over her shoulder and met Michael's warm gaze; then she and Richard exchanged loving smiles as she grasped his outstretched hand.

Malcolm nodded vaguely, retrieved his notes from his pocket, and briefly scanned them before continuing, "To clarify: betrayal is - when we deceive, mislead and let others

down; when we find someone has been disloyal; when it becomes clear that someone is not as they've tried to appear, they are not as they should be, or as they ought to be; and, when we behave as someone we are not...

As I said, there's a whole load of emotions stemming from betrayal; I think we should consider them and explore the reasons for our reactions..."

"Just a minute," Maria interrupted, "What you've said about betrayal – isn't it just the way it is with people? It makes me mad...but isn't it normal? I don't see what it's got to do with learnin' about being spiritual."

Malcolm smiled, "You have similar feelings to The Mother, Maria! When she and I discussed feeling betrayed she talked about how other people's behaviour sometimes causes her to feel aghast, then sad and angry, until she processes her feelings with 'allowing, accepting and acknowledging'."

"It's surprising that she feels those strong emotions."

"Umm... She explained that her feelings are similar to how we react as parents and teachers in situations where an errant child brings up our anger and frustration, mainly because we know they're behaving in a way that doesn't do them justice..."

In **spiritual** terms they are not being **who they really are!**

When caring love is disappointed, we feel angry."

"This is how The Mother feels?"

"I think she does; whenever she sees us failing to be what we could be...when we forget who we are...that is: forgetting to use our heart, and ignoring our powerful inner wisdom; then she sees us betraying ourselves...but she acknowledges that those feelings are also a betrayal of herself!"

He stroked his cheek, pensively, "When The Mother and I were preparing this talk, she spoke candidly of how a deepening relationship with the Divine makes the sense of others' betrayal worse – harder to bear."

"Why?"

"I think she'd say: the closer she gets to being Light, the more she sees the same light in others..."

She pointed out that she'd rather teach about the ultimate betrayal – of letting oneself down spiritually, that is, not responding with the light of our heart – than day-to-day incidents of feeling betrayed. And the truth is – when we focus upon our heart, and be who we are spiritually, we discover that ultimately we are not betrayed by the actions of others...

...which is what I think you meant at the start of our discussion, Vanessa."

She nodded, "You've reached the same conclusion: it's up to us not to feel betrayed; it's up to us to be in touch with our spiritual self; then we know we are light and cannot be affected by humanness."

Frank tentatively raised his hand to speak: "By concentrating on the **spiritual** definition of what it means to betray oneself, we can learn not to let everyday acts of betrayal affect us."

"That's so hard to take in!" Gabby moaned.

"That's why the mantra meditation is so appropriate," Malcolm responded enthusiastically, "When I repeat, 'Who Am I' it makes me think about my heart...reminds me that I am Light. But it's not easy!"

"It's never easy!" Vanessa agreed, "I found betrayal difficult to heal; it stuck with me - maybe because I was heavy with low self-esteem."

*“Indeed! Thank you, Vanessa! You’ve neatly brought us to the second ‘burp’ – feeling **Unworthy**.*

In fact, we’ll discover that the ‘burps’ are interconnected – thoughts and emotions found in one, lead us to the others...

*Vanessa has suggested that **Betrayal** sticks with us because of **Unworthiness**; and **feeling responsible, and powerless**...are difficult to let go of because of the last one – the ultimate burp – **the mistake of believing we are separate and alone.**”*

*“I’m still surprised to hear The Mother feels the same as us,” Gabby murmured, “I thought she’d have everything **right**.”*

“No spiritual teacher is perfect,” Vanessa explained gently, “A good teacher knows only too well they haven’t reached perfection, but they’re clear about their goal and the method of reaching it.”

“But she appears so serene; isn’t that a kind of betrayal...if she doesn’t feel that way?”

*“I think she’d agree with you, Gabby,” Malcolm replied softly, “She’d also remind us not to **try**, and not to **do**, but to **be** connected to our spirit...*

That’s the motivating force of the mantra...

Let’s repeat it again, before we move on to other ‘burps’.

Close your eyes. Watch the rise and fall of your breathing...in and out; then silently repeat, Who Am I, Who Am I, Who Am I.

Stay with this for a couple of minutes, then take a break – a comfort break – so that you’re ready to continue our discussion...”

When they resumed their seats, Malcolm’s stance had changed: he no longer grasped his notes, but stood with one hand in his pocket, looking thoughtfully towards the window:

*“What is it that causes us to live with the mistaken notion that we are **unworthy**? Why do so many of us feel it? Why do we hold on to it? Why is it that people who appear confident and self-assured actually feel unworthy and hide their low self-esteem behind a veneer of certainty?...*

Actually, these are questions that I mull over - sometimes about myself, but more frequently when I’m considering the best avenues for educating our young people.

The issue tends to be deeply ingrained and becomes a personality trait that holds us back from success, freedom of expression, and...and happiness.”

“That sums me up,” Gabby murmured, “Though I keep trying to shake it off.”

“That’s a funny expression,” Maria retorted, “Shouldn’t think it’s sumthin’ that’d shake off!”

“That’s why I’ve still got it then!” laughed Gabby.

“Well, at least you’re joking about it,” Malcolm grinned, “So you must be improving – re-discovering self-esteem!”

“I am. The Mother has encouraged me to let go of memories of past ill-treatment; I know she’d like me to think about people who hurt me in the way you described earlier - not feeling betrayed; I need to think differently about them and change the way I think of myself.”

*“Thanks, Gabby; thanks for sharing. As you continue to make progress with the way you **think**, The Mother’s healing intervention will work with your heart so that you – along with the rest of us – will learn to love yourself.”*

Frank joined in their exchange, "I still struggle with self-esteem," he admitted, "even though I haven't had previous unhappy experiences. Perhaps it is another facet of being human?"

"I think so," Malcolm agreed, "I also think early education exacerbates the issue by creating unnecessary striving for success and by using inappropriate motivation through competition...these are things that I feel strongly about and it's the reason why our school has the philosophy of, 'no matter what, you are valued'..."

The life lesson is to be sincerely proud of ourselves without sinking into boastful arrogance... To know and accept that we are intrinsically good... This is the crux of spirituality: to 'know who we are' and feel 'empowered' with that knowledge."

"Yes, but it's really difficult to live like I'm a strong, powerful shining light when I'm little old me!" Gabby complained.

"Well, active spirituality ought to change how we feel."

"What's 'active' spirituality?"

Malcolm scratched his head, "Help me out here, Vanessa! I'm used to receiving from The Mother, not explaining technicalities!"

Vanessa laughed, "Spiritual healing is a partnership between healer and client; working together, moving energy, creating change - emotionally, spiritually, and physically; and their work is consolidated through meditation."

"What's the 'movement of energy' that helps someone who feels unworthy?"

"Well, the centre of our ego - our 'little old me', as Gabby aptly describes it - is found at third chakra; in order to feel valued, ego needs to be in touch with the energy of our heart; so a healer directs heart energy into the third chakra, whilst reassuring ego that it may accept love from the heart; the assimilation - heart with third chakra - the place of spirit with the place of ego, enables us to re-discover what it means to have loving empowerment, to be lovingly empowered...and therefore comfortable with healthy self-esteem.

When we use this combination of energy we begin to understand that everything we do is 'unconditional'...our **doing** matters less... and we are happy with simply **being**."

"Thank you, Vanessa...you're helping us understand that a **change** of energy is crucial when we tackle feelings of unworthiness..."

He sensed she'd more to say, noted her hesitation, and, adopting his 'teacher mode', he folded his arm and rested his finger against his lips, "Go on..."

"I was going to suggest we do this for ourselves, right now."

"Perfect! Tell us what to do... In fact, if you wouldn't mind, come up to the front and join me here so that you can lead us."

Vanessa eased herself along the row of chairs, stood next to him, and immediately closed her eyes:

"Please rest your hand on your heart;

close your eyes;

breathe gently, slowly...feeling your breath, into your body - and out;

in and out;

Relax your forehead, your temples, your jaw...

And take your attention back to your heart;

Imagine green in and around your heart - all shades of green, dark, pastel, lime...like a patchwork of the countryside; the texture is soft, like a bed of lush grass.

Feel your breath entering the vibrant green...then, as you exhale think of the green sinking from your heart down into your body;

Repeat this – breathe into the vibrant green...then green sinks through your body as you breathe out...

Repeat again and notice how green enjoys finding its way down into your abdomen...

Breathe into the green...and then, with a long exhalation, fill the space of your abdomen with green.

The space, now overflowing with green, is your solar plexus; as its name suggests it would normally be yellow – like the sun.

If your ego is healthy - if you're filled with self-esteem - your third chakra, solar plexus, would shine out, brilliant, bright yellow;

However, it's been quiet lately; yellow appears as just a small dot, hiding deep down in your middle.

Green is its nourishment: refreshing and energising;

As green seeps in and fills the space, yellow responds...expanding and welcoming its 'visitor'...

Together they 'create'!

Green becomes more luscious; your heart expands out of your chest, your back, and out of the sides of your body;

Yellow grows and beams its bright sphere from your abdomen – your ego centre...

Its brilliance increases,

Then softens to become a solar glow amidst the green.

Two companions are now sustaining each other:

Heart loves to give, loves to be received;

Ego enjoys the power of praise, of acknowledgment;

Being effective.

You are Who You Are...

Breathe gently; enjoy how you feel at this moment, knowing you have changed your energy towards pure self-worth.

When you're ready, open your eyes..." she glanced at Malcolm, "That's it!"

*Malcolm took a deep breath, "It's difficult to say anything after that experience!" he cleared his throat, "Thank **you**..."*

As Vanessa made her way back to her seat, Gabby slowly raised her hand; "I felt warmth in my middle during your work, thank you so much! Does this mean I'll be able to stop myself having to be busy, trying to do good things?"

Malcolm glanced at Vanessa, awaiting her response, then remembering he was expected to reply, he recovered his thoughts, "Indeed. The point is that we don't have to 'do' or 'achieve' in order to feed self-worth; I think that's where, yet again, we can appreciate the value of the mantra meditation, 'Who am I'; those three words ought to nurture the truth that we are spirit, with no reason to prove ourselves."

Gabby persisted, "Where do you think the idea that we have to be good enough, have to be important, have to be accepted...comes from?"

Malcolm stroked his chin, "Remember the wisdom that The Mother reiterates when she's teaching: We are spirit; we're not alone; we're part of a whole. We are precious, powerful aspects of something big which we call, 'pure consciousness'.

She wants us to grow into the realisation of being one with the Divine; when this is realised, self-worth is no longer relevant. As spirit beings we're inspired with power, centred at solar plexus; with a healthy ego we're empowered without conceit."

Maria fidgeted and frowned, then suddenly exclaimed, "We think we're unworthy 'cos somehow we forgot everything: self love, healin' power, bein' good enough just becos...we forgot we're spirit!"

*"Yes! That's it! **That's** the reason why most of us live the mistaken 'burp' of feeling unworthy. We've forgotten! We've all forgotten! Thanks again, Maria..."*

Now's a good time to take in your words, and complete Vanessa's work, by using our mantra meditation again; it'll make us think about breathing - not doing; we'll realise the importance of being quiet; it will bring us in touch with wisdom, and remind us we're part of something much bigger than our little self; it will help to bring about healthy empowerment with no fear of being alone and helpless... It will remind us who we are!

*Let's settle back into meditation...breathing and repeating the mantra, 'Who Am I'...for another couple of minutes; then we'll have another break, so that we're ready to continue and discuss the 'burp'- feeling **Responsible**..."*

Although the evening 'lunch 'n' lecture' had begun with substantial food, they followed Maria's encouragement - helping themselves to further refreshment during their break.

Malcolm hurriedly swallowed his snack and brushed his palms together, eager to continue:

"Responsible."

He watched their attentive faces, "Let's be clear about this meaning of responsible:

It's a 'burp'," he grinned, "a mistake..."

So, we're not talking about: 'responsible: the quality of being a dependable person', nor, 'being responsible: accepting appropriate accountability.'

*We need to think about: **feeling responsible: the issue of wrongly blaming ourselves for the feelings and reactions of others...***

Let's face it - we've all teased ourselves with the thoughts: 'I shouldn't have said that, now they'll be upset...wish I hadn't done that, I've caused a problem'..."

"It's more than a tease," Gabby sighed.

"Alright, a wail then," Malcolm chuckled, "...a wail loaded with mistaken responsibility, driven by feelings of low self-esteem."

"Yes! I know all about this burp, I'm an expert!" she groaned, light-heartedly.

He looked towards the window, waiting for their laughter to subside...

***"Responsible** is the 'other side of the coin' to **Betrayal**: one is created by ourself - we allow ourselves to feel responsible; the other comes from the behaviour of others.*

*Both have their roots in the mistake of feeling **Unworthy**..." he watched their expressions, "See how burps feed each other?"*

*He continued, "Each burp carries the same unhealthy burden - 'dis-ease', as The Mother would say; though I think 'responsible' is loaded with much more **fear** than the others..."*

*"I see that," Frank pondered out loud: "If we're constantly feeling **responsible**, we live with self-induced fear...living fearfully - we're timid, forever wondering what we've done*

to others; whereas **betrayal** brings fear to us – we're upset by others' behaviour towards us, we're wary – fearful - around some people..."

"That's right!" Malcolm beamed, becoming energised by their contributions, "Come to think of it, fear weaves its way through all the burps: **fear of being betrayed; living fearfully when we feel unworthy; fearing others' reactions when we think we're responsible; fear of not being able to cope when we believe we're powerless; fearful of being alone.**"

"The opposite of fear is love..." Sophie tentatively joined the conversation, then hesitated, startled at her own remark...

"Yes...?" Malcolm waited; his warm gaze gave her confidence...

"...so love ought to be found in burps too!"

"Indeed!" he smiled, "Finding **Love** within each...becomes their remedy."

"Self love, self approval," Frank murmured.

"That's what it all boils down to..." Malcolm chuckled, "our burps are resolved!"

"If only they were!" Frank grinned, "Can you explain why there's more fear attached to feeling 'responsible'?"

Malcolm stroked his chin, "Well, it's possible that the 'responsible' burp creates an internal self-exaggerated fear that we stew over...we're frightened of what we've said or done, we're fearful of what others think about us, we fear their reaction... Feeling responsible is really loaded with fear."

He paused, and took a deep breath, "I recall how I felt when my betrayal was revealed...obviously, a huge amount of responsibility for the feelings of others – although I've since learned the wisdom that we're now discovering...that each of us must deal with our own 'burps' as they arise..." he frowned, "What was I saying? Oh yes: taking on responsibility for everyone's reaction to my 'coming out' made me feel I was **drowning in fear.**"

"I know that feeling," Gabby whispered, "...going over and over what I've said to people, analysing conversations so I can't sleep, wishing I hadn't said this or that..."

You're right, Malcolm," she gulped, "It's suffocating; I drown myself in fear."

He paused, took a few moments for deep breathing, and smiled encouragingly as he watched her recover; then he continued gently, "The Mother helped me understand that 'exaggerated fear' has power over us when our Heart's not in charge; when we're not owning our Spirit-self; when we lose touch with our 'Real Self'..."

She says..." he looked down at his notes, "'Be willing to embrace the truth behind the phrase – Who Am I'..." He smiled to himself, "I just love it! Love the fact that The Mother introduced the mantra; when I respond with it, I feel Heart opening...becoming a gateway for Spirit..."

He closed his eyes and rested his hand against his chest, "Imagine letting go of all human pretending – all the burps..."

this place – Heart – then feels so much freedom...

so our Spirit can be itself;

As we meditate - 'Who Am I' – we're released from the burden of being responsible, and learn to confidently assume **spiritual responsibility** for what we say and do."

"That's wonderful!" Maria murmured; she copied Malcolm's action of hand-on-heart, and sat mesmerised by her thoughts, while Frank busily scribbled on a note-pad. Unaware of the quietude around him, he looked up from his writing, and stared directly at Malcolm, "So, there's 'mistaken' responsibility and 'spiritual' responsibility."

Malcolm waited for a few moments, gazing towards the window; then he nodded as he gathered thoughts: "It's the paradox of the burp! On the one hand, mistaken responsibility: 'It's my fault, I'm to blame, I shouldn't have said or done...' timid behaviour - filled with fear, we lose ourself in the burden of responsibility.

On the other hand, spiritual responsibility: 'It's me, I am Who I Am; what I say and do is guided by the truth of my heart...' strong affirmations - full of power, we own our spirit self."

He scanned his prompt card, "The Mother loves this kind of contradiction! She says there's always spiritual depth to be revealed when we explore a paradox..."

She talked to me about a '**Crowd of One**'..." he grinned, "I found it quite perplexing! She says: we feel lonely, alone, a 'crowd of one' - isolated in the crowd of humanity - when we're inappropriately responsible: we crowd our mind with unnecessary thoughts, and distance ourselves in our unhappiness.

Alternatively, when we come to the realisation that we're connected to everyone and a part of everything - a member of '**The Crowd of One**' - we find that we're joyfully responsible, knowing the powerful truth: My heart is the heart of everyone. My heart is a gateway to who I am. Spirit is who I am. My heart guides me, showing me I am whole, and 'whole-ly' responsible as my Spirit self."

He paused, gulped water, and nodded his thanks when Maria jumped up to refill his glass, then he looked intently around the room, "Does this make sense? We've let go of being responsible...in order to take responsibility!"

Maria rushed from the kitchen, "I don't get 'crowd of one'," she called, "I ain't that clever!"

He relaxed with her easy familiarity, "You're wiser than you let on, Maria! You and I are used to puzzling over quotes from The Mother; we'll talk about the 'Crowd of One' again when we reach the final burp - feeling **Separate**. Ok?"

She nodded as she plonked herself breathlessly on her chair immediately in front of him.

Satisfied with her response, he turned his attention to Gabby, "You've gone very quiet!"

"You don't need to feel responsible for me!" she grinned. "Actually, when we talked about 'drowning in fear', I felt upset and uncomfortable, then suddenly warmth around my heart returned... The same feeling I had during Vanessa's meditation...as though my heart suddenly woke up!"

Malcolm glanced at Vanessa, "Your thoughts?"

"A lovely feeling! Heart's healing green is invigorated, and gives comfort and confidence - felt as warmth - to our ego..."

...Actually, while you were explaining The Mother's paradox, Malcolm, I thought of this: **Responsibility is the ability to respond...** Our 'ability to respond' is to stand up for our spiritual self and say, 'It's all about me.'"

"That's another of The Mother's favourite phrases," Gabby interrupted, "she knows I think it selfish... In fact," she frowned, "I've been selfish this evening - taking over much of the discussion: I've really made the lecture, 'all about me!'"

"That's not a problem," Frank responded firmly, "if we're honest we all share your feelings."

*“Absolutely!” Vanessa joined in, “And whatever fear **you** bring to the discussion is effectively addressed for us all; that’s the truth of Spiritual Oneness... When we each take responsibility for ourself, we’re helping everyone else...*

Here’s a thought:” she glanced at Malcolm, and with his nod of approval, she continued, “imagine standing in the centre of a circle surrounded by spinning plates, each representing people we care about; when we leave the centre to attend to one plate we unbalance the whole; if we try to keep one plate spinning we find that others start to fail; we become dizzy from turning in the circle and from facing the dilemma of falling plates...everyone is frantic, no one is happy.

Alternatively, we can stand in the centre, keeping our own ‘plate’ spinning; the energy from this spreads out into the circle, the plates create their own gyration; each has taken responsibility for themselves, no-one is responsible for others. All is well.”

Malcolm tucked his note cards under his armpit and applauded, “Beautiful! We will remember that image! Thank you, Vanessa; your teaching feels satisfying and familiar...”

“Like listening to The Mother,” Maria glanced from Malcolm to Vanessa, and grinned, “she’d be proud of how you two ‘ave worked together...as if you’ve been rehearsin’!”

Malcolm laughed, “Shall we continue?”

*...The next burp is **Powerless.**”*

He cleared his throat and paused before speaking somewhat dramatically, “We’re not supposed to be powerful! Ethical principles suggest we’re meant to be humble, submissive, docile...! We shirk from power, thinking it’s bad! And we’ve accepted the mistaken idea that power means ‘power over’!

With all this fearful imagining we’ve become accustomed to suppressing our power, with the result that we find ourselves weakened, feeling incapable, living the mistake that we’re powerless...

We feel we shouldn’t! We think we can’t! Then we fear the repercussions if we do...”

His audience seemed to squirm with the uncomfortable truth he directed at them.

He waited, aware of the uncanny silence, pleased with the effect he’d had.

He took a deep breath, and rested his hand on his solar plexus, “We actually create the burp – ‘powerless’, and nurture it right here, in our abdomen...”

In fact, all the burps we’ve discussed – betrayed, unworthy, responsible – have their energy firmly stuck here, in the third chakra,” he rubbed his middle, “We know this is the centre of ego, and we’ve learned that it’s the focal point of our ‘mental body’...”

Vanessa showed us that these burps - lodged in our middle – may be healed in two ways: by encouraging heart’s energy to flow into third chakra, and by changing the way we perceive ourself...including how we relate to others.”

He continued to stroke his abdomen, “Let’s go over again how we can change the ‘burp energies’ for good: we’ve learned that it’s up to us not to feel betrayed; we’ve transformed energy of ‘unworthy’ to that of ‘self worth’ by merging heart and third chakra; and we’ve realised that we should pay attention to ourself rather than worrying about being responsible for others...”

“It’s all ‘appening just ‘ere!” Maria copied Malcolm, rubbing her tummy enthusiastically.

"Feel free to join us!" Malcolm laughed, "Massaging our 'centre of self' ought to be quite healing!

Actually, you may have noticed how we make the third chakra our place of identity..." He kept his hand on his middle, and feigned a slight bow: "When we introduce ourselves – when we refer to ourselves – we put our hand here...indicating our 'self', our 'me'! We think of our ego as our 'me'.

Here's the irony: our ego centre, the place of 'me', located at solar plexus, is also the space where spiritual power is centred."

"Powerless or powerful..." Richard blurted, "I mean...there's potential for conflict here: between ego – which wants to be the 'boss'; and spiritual power – which ought to have control; this has the makings of a personal battleground...with the likelihood of manifesting many stress related illnesses..."

"I get indigestion," Frank murmured.

"heart-burn,"

"hernia,"

"ulcer,"

"nausea," ...their suggestions poured out spontaneously.

Malcolm raised his eyebrows, "Well done! Good! You've finally woken from an after-dinner nap!"

They laughed.

"Sometimes posture shows up our difficulty," Simon spoke hesitantly from the back of the room; then, with sudden confidence, he stood up to demonstrate what he meant: "I'm tall, but tend to stoop, and have a habit of holding my arm across my body...like this..."

"Many of us do that!" Frank responded, enthusiastically, "We're being defensive – folding our arms over our place of power!"

"Going back to what Dr Taverner said..." a new member of the group ventured into the discussion.

"It's Richard...please call me, Richard."

"Sorry, yes...what Richard was saying - about the conflict of power and ego: it's the battle that explains why egotistical behaviour appears so fierce."

"Yes!" his neighbour added, "power goes to our head...or rather, power goes to our solar plexus – our thought centre – where the 'solar' intensity either burns or brightens."

"'Burn or brighten' – you've 'brilliantly' described the alternatives!" Malcolm intervened excitedly, "...to burn with ego fire, or blaze with spiritual power!"

"Fiery ego is really a cover-up...an arrogant blaze of self glory!"

"Yes! It's a defensive reaction to fear."

"I'm losing the gist of this," Gabby complained, "What's the battle? What are we afraid of now?"

Once again, as had been his habit during the course of his lecture, Malcolm acted in his familiar, skilful teacher role: encouraging their interaction, he moved to the side of the room, rested his arm across his body, and tapped his finger against his lip, "Explain, Richard..."

"I suppose it's another paradox: ego wants to be in control, thinks it's boss, although it tends to bluster and flail around when decisions have to be made, because, in truth, it lacks esteem – as we've discussed – and therefore feels powerless; it wants to be heard, and yet resents, and fears, what it sees as competition."

"Spiritual Power is its competition?"

"Ego thinks so..."

"It's forgotten!" Maria shouted out, gleefully, "Forgotten, 'Who Am I'"

"That's right! Ego mistakenly believes it's threatened by spiritual power, which it sees as something other than itself..."

The reaction in the body might be: feeling stuck or bloated, causing a lack of energy, whenever we think we're powerless; or burning indigestion whenever we exert a controlling abuse of power."

"I'm confused," Gabby moaned, "You're explaining everything theoretically... You've lost me! Can you help with a simple image, Vanessa?"

"Can't immediately think of one! Sorry about my husband's overwhelming theory!" she grinned mischievously, "Although we'll all understand his examples of the mind/body connection when we pay attention to how the chakras work through us...when we feel the consequences of 'burps' within our body..."

Right?" she glanced sideways at Richard, and grinned.

"You're always right, my darling!" he chuckled, "How can a wife be otherwise?"

Malcolm spoke through their laughter, "Without causing a domestic, Vanessa!" he smirked, "Could you explain how you've grown spiritually by noticing the workings of the chakras?"

She stood up, "As I tried to 'make it' through adolescence, I became curious about 'religion', wondering if religious practice could keep me from feeling alone... I did a lot of searching... Then, one day I felt a changed 'state of heart'..."

"What happened?" Gabby gazed at her, intently.

"Well, whenever I'd tried to pray, I thought about a distant, powerful God...and I felt weak and useless - unworthy!" She glanced behind her, "Like Simon, I wanted to cringe and cover my middle; my tummy always felt uneasy...actually queasy, nauseous...you could say I felt 'gutted'!"

Then, when I discovered meditation, my perception changed," she frowned thoughtfully, "Instead of being overwhelmed by the thought of a distant power having influence over me, I felt a sense of the 'divine' inside me...a feeling of warmth, confidence and power. My self-perception improved, as well as my perception of the world.

I felt more peaceful in my 'middle', instinctively understanding that unhappy feelings which I'd felt in my tummy were relieved, and that thoughts no longer twisted my 'gut'..."

Richard talked about an inner conflict. That's what it was like for me! In fact, before I practiced meditation, my inner world felt like a huge battleground: chattering thoughts made me want to be busy, striving for something, trying to achieve impossible goals...my body reacted by tightening up, and nauseous feelings were an everyday challenge..."

Gradually, I learned to patiently notice how thoughts and feeling directly impacted my body, particularly in the areas of the second and third chakras..."

Through meditation I discovered how to change the reactions: now, my thoughts and feelings have become more measured, with greater depth; I follow those thoughts...and make better decisions..."

*"You became **empowered**."*

"I've become empowered," she repeated Malcolm's affirmation, and they both fell silent.

"And the inner battle?" Gabby's impatient curiosity interrupted their communion.

Vanessa smiled, "The 'old unworthy me' has learned that it feels good to be empowered, to trust my spirit self; so there's more companionship between my 'ego' self and my 'spirit' self."

"That's the image you described: heart sending its green energy into our middle."

"Yes! That image shows how the energy of heart merges with that of third chakra: heart reaches down to bathe our ego with loving power; then, as we learn to be gentle and patient with ego – treating it as you would a frightened child – it reaches up to gain strength and comfort from our heart; the combination creates empowerment, then..." she looked triumphantly at the member of the group who'd previously spoken, "our middle doesn't burn with uncontrolled power, but makes its loving energy shine its spiritual power, like a welcoming sun at our solar centre..."

She beamed with elation, and sat down.

For a few moments he silently gazed across the room, and then his face also lit up, "Thank you, Vanessa!"

I was just thinking: What would our behaviour be like if we consistently practiced Vanessa's image of the healthy relationship of spirit with ego, heart with third chakra? If we allowed our centre of ego power to become a loving beacon of spiritual light?"

"We'd be naturally assertive... healthily confident," Frank started their flow of ideas:

"comfortable with ourself,"

"comfortable around others..."

"...whatever their behaviour,"

"We'd feel spiritually comfortable..."

"compassionate,"

"intuitive...we'd notice our spiritual light..."

"...The Mother would say we'd see with more than our eyes!"

"In tune with the Universe,"

"In tune with ourselves..."

"healthily active,"

"sexually expressive."

"We'd use spirit self – intuition - to get through difficulties."

Malcolm seemed delighted at their enthusiasm, but then he studied his watch, held his hand up to stop their responses, and cleared his throat with embarrassment, "It's later than I thought! Our discussion has taken much longer than planned... I'm delighted, but have to apologise," he fiddled with his watch and stared uncertainly at the floor, "We're at a good place to end for now...I think you'd like me to draw the evening to a close?"

Maria fidgeted on the edge of her seat, "Well, I think you should carry on 'til we've finished; we need our last burp!"

Their laughter accompanied a short applause, and they remained seated, gradually settling in the expectation that Malcolm would continue his lecture to its planned conclusion.

He removed his watch, slipped it into his pocket and grinned, "Alright! So be it! On we go to our final 'burp' – the mistake of thinking ourselves **Separate**.

This burp comes at the end of our very long discussion, yet it seems to me to be the most significant, and the one that – if we correct its mistake – helps all the other burps to be resolved.

So, what does it mean to carry the burden of feeling **separate**?

I think Vanessa has already touched upon the symptoms?" He glanced at her, expectantly.

"Yes," she responded eagerly, "There's a sense of aloneness when we believe we're forced into a relationship of 'separateness'...when we feel a distance...between us and 'God'."

"And that makes yer feel separate from everyone..." Maria interrupted, "yer don't even want to be near some people; that's my problem, my biggest burp!"

"I'm surprised..." Frank spoke softly, "I thought you'd got over feeling inadequate, especially after our group here gelled so quickly."

"I did feel better, when 'us Sputniks' first met," she folded her arms, resolutely, "...making friends with Gabby and Sophie - and the rest of you; I felt much happier in the village; but since I've been learnin' about healin' I get irritated and angry with folks."

"I know the feeling," Vanessa murmured.

"And so does The Mother!" Malcolm volunteered.

"I'm so surprised!" Gabby exclaimed, "I wish I could understand how **really good** people..."

...like you, Maria, ...and The Mother,

...and you too, Vanessa...can be unhappy with others."

"This may be a good moment to return to that odd phrase - 'The Crowd of One'..." Malcolm grinned, "...and try to make sense of it!

What does it mean for you, Maria?...

Vanessa?..."

Maria vigorously launched into describing her difficulty: "When The Mother explained that I could do healin'...well...it didn't help my trouble with folks! When I'm close to some people I feel worse; it makes me so angry when I get a sense of how they're behavin'."

"I get irritable and impatient..." Vanessa admitted, "We share the same feelings."

"Is it an explanation of the 'crowd of one'?" Malcolm asked, tentatively.

"Yes!" they responded together.

Vanessa continued, "I think one meaning of the peculiar phrase is the feeling of living in a crowd, but never being **part** of it... Perhaps Maria and I feel crowded by our 'oneness' - our spiritual connection with everyone - which really means, our aloneness; we're frequently overwhelmed by emotions and thoughts - our own and those of others, which makes us feel irritable as we battle within our own lonely crowd..." She frowned, "It's like being lost on a busy station platform..."

"That's exactly how it feels," Maria sounded relieved.

"And then, ironically, with the emergence of spiritual depth and the ability to heal - gaining an active, vibrant connection with everyone - there's the same sense of bewildered separation because, even though you feel deeply connected...the communion is hardly ever reciprocated..."

"You experience a sense of 'Oneness' in realms and depths that most have not yet grasped?" Malcolm suggested.

Vanessa stared at the floor; a deep sigh trembled through her. Richard reached to grasp her hand, and she welcomed his look of sensitive connection; she smiled faintly, "Spirituality touches us at the deepest level of our being, and yet shows itself in the most innocent of reactions which can be so confusing - for people like Maria and me, and for all those trying to understand us."

She glanced towards Maria with a brighter smile, "Perhaps when everyone learns to behave as their spirit self we'll feel the unity...and we'll be that 'crowd of one'!"

Malcolm stroked his face, thoughtfully, "You've both talked about the sense of separation from **people**...and you've mentioned feeling separate from 'God'."

Vanessa nodded, "I think that's the absolute crux of the 'separate and alone' burp."

Frank gazed at her searchingly, "I thought meditation paved the way to experience a connection with 'God' – with The Divine?"

"That, and education; don't you think?" Malcolm added.

Vanessa didn't respond.

Malcolm saw her reticence and focussed back on the whole group; he spoke with energy: "We need to learn from wisdom – through meditation and intuition; and, we in education, need to teach the truth..."

Spiritual truth actually leans on science - physics, astrophysics...cosmology, giving proof that the universe emerged from one 'thing', so we are 'bound' to be connected!

Also, we should not ignore the fact that ancient religious teachings - the Vedas - complement science, teaching that an inexplicable energy was there at 'the beginning' and from this everything has gradually unfolded and evolved."

Vanessa suddenly spoke up with firmness: "Yes! Cosmology scientifically proves we've come from one; intuition infers we're connected; spirituality brings an inner knowing that it's true."

"The Mother's strange phrase – 'The Crowd of One' - means we're all in it!" Maria chuckled, "We're one crowd. We're a crowd of One. We all belong together because we're all one! We know we're all connected in an amazin' way when strange things 'appen: when someone phones just when we've bin thinking about them; when we suddenly know something important is happening somewhere else; when an animal wants to be close..."

"Then, what makes you feel angry?" Gabby sounded bemused.

Maria suddenly deflated, "I'm sad, confused, irritable and angry 'cos folks don't get it..."

"And disappointed when we all don't behave like we could...or should..." Vanessa joined in, with an uncertain smile, "You're right, Gabby – it's a mistake to be angry and impatient; it would be more helpful to make sense of what stops us being wise: maybe it's because our minds have been filled with competition; our emotions are crammed with 'me'; our heart has forgotten how to 'be'."

"Well said!" Malcolm clapped a couple of times, then held his hands together, rubbing his palms as he prepared to conclude the lecture in a summary of the 'burps': "**Separation** is the most significant mistake we make:

If you think you're separate, you feel abandoned, and therefore, **unworthy**;

Where you feel you're on your own, you think you're **powerless**;

If you believe you're separate, you feel everything is solely in your hands, you feel **responsible**;

If you live with separation, you'll exist with the fear of being **betrayed**.

Separate is not what we are;

Separation is impossible when we were created in One-ness.

Feeling separate - disconnected from 'who we are' - is the most difficult for us to understand, and the hardest for us to take in the consequences...

However, The Mother is looking forward to talking about what it means to be profoundly 'Connected'..."

*“She wants that for all of us...” Maria murmured, reverently, “...to see ourselves as each other, but then to accept that we can all be however we choose... Then, I guess it’ll be easy not to feel **responsible**, and know we can’t be **betrayed!**”*

“Beautifully put!” Malcolm bowed slightly to Maria, and then towards Vanessa, “Thank you, both!”

He pushed his notes into his pocket, and retrieved his watch, “Thank you all!”

He beamed through their applause, “Thank you for coming this evening, for your attentiveness, for joining in, and for your patience in seeing our burps to their conclusion!”