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Wholistic Healing through Energy Psychology (EP) for Veterans

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As a certified Emotional Freedom Techniques “EFT” Practitioner, coming from a background of coaching, and as the daughter of a WWII Veteran and POW, I have been blessed to be able to help many Veterans who suffer from the trauma of deployment and the exposure to the horrors of war.

EFT is a gentle combination of acupressure that is applied by tapping on designated meridians while focusing on the emotional component of a traumatic memory or negative belief that holds charge for the client. The issue that is being worked on is then specified into a meaningful phrase for the client, and repeated, while tapping on the meridian points to release the charge.

Other techniques, such as the Wholistic Hybrid of EMDR and EFT (WHEE), Tapas Acupressure Technique (TAT), Thought Field Therapy (TFT) and others are also based on accessing the body’s subtle energies to release the intensity of trauma, and many studies have shown the effectiveness of these methods.

When I started to offer free EFT sessions to Veterans, it became quickly apparent that there is minimal interest in the military as well as in individual active duty personnel and Veterans to reach out for help with the emotional traumas that very often follow military training and deployment. I realized that unless I understand more about the inner world of Veterans, military mindset and training, I will not be effective in reaching out and offering support.

As a coach, my methods and goals for working with Veterans differ from mental health practice and psychotherapeutic practice. My approach does not begin with which method works best for the present trauma, but which method is the most acceptable for each individual person who has suffered the traumas of war. During an EFT session we don’t judge, condone or excuse what happened to the client. Instead we take the emotional charge out of the past, so that the client can move on with his or her life and make choices and decisions that are now independent from what he or she has experienced.

I believe that one of the most important aspects of the healing relationship is that the practitioner is authentic with the methods used; respectful and insightful about the military and the warrior's inner world; and is sensitive and insightful about how to relate to military training and military ways of thinking and responding, which are quite different in many ways from civilian ways of responding.

The traumas that the soldiers experience happen not only at the physical, emotional, mental and relational but also, and perhaps most importantly, on the soul level. One of my Veterans, a POW

explained to me: "When they captured me, it felt like they attached a tow truck to my soul and pulled it out of me. I could never reconnect; things were never the same again."

I noticed that most Veterans don't talk about this to someone outside of the Veterans' community, unless they trust that the practitioner understands and relates to the feeling of the loss of their soul that they endured. This deep, dark feeling of being disconnected from one's soul is too personal and vulnerable to discuss in a controversial manner, and many fear they will not be taken seriously when they talk about this to someone who doesn't understand the soul component of war trauma. However, I have seen time and time again that when veterans realize that the practitioner is aware of the soul wound that he or she endured, they usually confirm their suffering from the loss of their soul.

Healing the soul wound is deep, spiritual work that requires a strong, trusting, personal relationship. Most Veterans choose a buddy for this, or a trusted family member. According to a RAND study on "Invisible wounds of war" (Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008), 39.4% of returning warriors feel that "My family or friends would be more helpful than a mental health professional."

These factors help to explain some of the the reluctance of Veterans to respond to offers of help and support from conventional therapists in conventional settings. The Veterans perceive these as distant and lacking in the sorts of understandings of their conditions that would make it possible for the Veterans to communicate, to be understood, and to be helped on all the levels of their wounds.

Moving deeper in my understanding of Veterans

Early in my work with Veterans, I wondered what they find in the relationship with a buddy or close family member that helps them heal. I wanted to learn more about why a trusted relationship was perceived by so many of these warriors as more important and desirable than mental health care. I trusted that we might find a missing, important piece of information about the true nature of healing war trauma - when we listen carefully and work to understand and to relate with an open mind and without judgment.

I found it important to learn as much as I could about what being a warrior means, as well as the archetypal functioning of the 'tribe' members. I have been focusing on learning how I can help Veterans complete their archetypal paths of warriors, as they readjust from traumas of military duty, discharge and re-entry into civilian life.

I learned that in many native tribes the boys at a certain age are separated from the tribe by the elders and prepared to become warriors. The ordeal of the battle serves as a rite of passage, where the warrior seeks transformation into adulthood, to take a new place in society. In battle, the warrior faces his own limitations and can find himself in an almost godlike situation, where he has the power to grant or take life, as well as sacrifice his own life for a higher purpose such as protecting his tribe. The tribe witnesses the ordeal, and offers respect by telling the stories of the warriors and the battle. Then the tribe takes responsibility for the war and releases the warrior from having to carry the burden of what happened. The warrior goes through a cleansing ritual and takes his new place in society, often including his receiving a new name that acknowledges his new status in the tribe.

When a warrior does not have the support of his community and society, and where there are no rituals for processing battlefield experiences, and where he has to struggle with] betrayal of that which is right during his ordeal, his path can be interrupted. He can literally get emotionally and

cognitively stuck during his rite of passage. One common situation that can cause this is when the elders – in our society the chain of command – lets him down instead of supporting and protecting him as it was the traditional role of the elders. In Vietnam, for example, the chain of command could be disconnected frequently, while the soldiers remained in the jungle, facing endangerment through an inexperienced commander they couldn't trust. For a veteran, this is a huge betrayal on his sacred contract as a warrior and causes great anger.

Another painful example is when the tribe lets the warrior down. Many returning Vietnam veterans were spit at and called baby killers. This is often one of the first traumas I work on with a Vietnam Veteran. Today's warriors repeatedly share how unbearable they find the rage and the sense of betrayal by the tribe - those whom he was sent out to protect and lay down his life for.

Developing healing relationships with Veterans

I find it important to accept my role not just as a healing facilitator, but also as a tribe member who honors and respects the warrior, offers forgiveness for reprehensible behaviors the warrior found herself or himself displaying under the tremendous stresses of war zone situations, and takes responsibility for the war at large, understanding that soldiers are sent by their tribe to fight for them.

By taking this role, I can help a warrior with EFT to connect with and release the sense of betrayal, and to finish his rite of passage. Then he or she can help other people as well. Healing others is the final stage of the path of the archetypal warrior.

Before we can create a healing relationship with a Veteran, we are often facing a symptom of war trauma that needs to be overcome first. It was explained to me this way: "Imagine you have a broken leg, and the orthopedic doctor is on the 17th floor without an elevator. You know you should go up there and get help, but the very nature of your injury doesn't allow for you to do this. If you have a broken leg, you can't climb stairs!"

Conclusion: If we don't present ourselves in the ways the Veterans need us to be, they will not be able to accept our help, no matter how effective our techniques are.

Here is my rationale:

When working with people who have general PTSD, we are dealing with three components:

Re-experiencing, Arousal and Avoidance of exposing themselves to situations and potential triggers that might re-trigger the memories and reactions.

Most of the conventional treatments for Veterans focus on releasing the flashbacks and hyper-arousal with psychotherapy or blocking these with chemicals that deaden the emotions and numb the mind.

When approaching Veterans [with offers of help for their traumas, our first challenge is usually to deal with the third symptom: Avoidance (for all the reasons detailed above).

As long as a Veteran avoids contacting us, avoids his or her own trauma, avoids reaching out or accepting the help we offer, all of our methods are useless. They only work with

people who have overcome their avoidance of triggers and memories, and are willing to be open to accepting help and healing.

This is a problem of major importance and consequences. Gary Craig, the founder of EFT, announced my first offers for free EFT session for observational single case studies in his newsletter right after the filming of an extraordinary series of demonstrations of the benefits of EFT for wartime emotional traumas. (The results of this series were published in the IJHC and later included in other studies and papers.) I received less than 10 responses from the collective 450.000 subscribers. I realized how important it was that I learned more about this phenomenon - that most Veterans don't ask for help, even if it is free.

Here is some of what I found. I am not claiming to have the ultimate solution or to know all there is to know, by any means. The Veterans are avoiding us to a large extent, and so is the military. I truly believe this is a symptom, not bad will. The military is a very traumatized society, and PTSD symptoms don't only show up in the single soldier, but in the military society at large. The military has been very slow to acknowledge the problems of emotional traumas within its ranks. So when we ask ourselves which method works best for helping the Veterans, we have to wonder first: Which method helps them overcome avoidance? What do we need to do, how do we need to present ourselves, what do we need to understand and demonstrate in order to help them?

My understanding at this point is that a number of aspects are helpful in the beginning stages of helping the troops heal:

- 1) Soldiers are trained to follow commands. Therefore a reliable, structured method is preferred over unstructured soul searching.
- 2) Soldiers are used to working in interdependent, hierarchic circumstances. Many are well aware that they are not trained to deal with traumatic memories. So if we want to become a part of the healing team, we have to be predictable and reliable, as well as to appropriately "lead the way" and initiate the tapping process. I know that some will cringe in reading this. This approach is not meant to be an overstepping of ethical or professional boundaries through dictatorial prescriptions, but rather in the authenticity and taking charge with the methods we offer.
- 3) Soldiers are comfortable with drills. They are trained that there is one linear way of doing most tasks and everybody does it the same way. Drills keep everybody safe and the processes predictable, smooth and functioning.
4. Maintaining a regular schedule and consistent approaches is important. Changing of practitioners or switching between methods can be traumatic and confusing, causing veterans to terminate the relationship.

This is naturally not the complete list, and there is a lot more to be learned from the Veterans we help. The above, however, may aid us to move past the first hurdles of avoidance as we explore which methods work best for traumatized Veterans.

My "weapon of choice" is EFT because:

- EFT enables me to provide a structured format in which I communicate with the Veteran I am helping so I can make sure that she or he doesn't drift away into deep darkness when trying to hold a traumatic thought or memory. This is a risk with techniques that require the

soldier to tune in and wait until a method works – even when the waiting period to see results is as brief as it can be with EP.

I have talked to several soldiers who reported being severely traumatized by EMDR, as the intensity they felt about what happened felt overwhelming and they were not able to focus on the instructions. This experience can close the doors to trying a new healing method forever.

- The EFT format enables me to take a legitimate place as a tribe member, offering gratitude, respect, honor and unconditional forgiveness. As we work together, the therapist joins the veteran in taking a tribal responsibility for what happened in war.

- The EFT protocol offers a predictable drill that never changes; a structured method that is being applied in one standard way to anything from physical symptoms to limiting beliefs to the emotional charge linked to traumatic memories.

- The EFT technique allows the practitioner to appropriately "lead the way" by initiating the tapping process and helping the veteran tweak and sharpen the focus of the set up phrases that the soldier came up with. There is comfort in a reliable, easy to teach and apply drill that brings measurable results.

- EFT is a technique that allows for the soldiers to take leadership when they are ready. When soldiers feel that they know what to tap on, they "lead the way" and I repeat and follow. This way they gain confidence and experience, and can finish their archetypal paths as warriors.

In closing

I feel that it is important to talk about our thoughts and beliefs of the ultimate goal for a session. Warriors will always be different from the rest of society, no matter how much we try to integrate them. Their lives and worldviews have been drastically and irreversibly altered by their military experiences. The military has developed very effective ways for training civilians to become soldiers. Following the archetypal path of the warrior, it is not only up to therapists and other caregivers in the civilian sector, but to all civilians who care about Veterans to develop the ways to help soldiers to become civilians again, while accepting that the major impacts of their life experiences may forever leave them different in vital ways from those who have not shared their traumas and their recoveries from these life challenges.

We should not expect someone to fit into a mold of "being healed" in a sense that life is back to normal, back to pre-war. pre-military times. Soldiers who undergo military training and who experiences war zone deployment will be changed forever. I believe that my spiritual task as a healing facilitator is to help them claim new places in society; to see value and gain wisdom from what they have been through and, if they so desire, to begin a path as a teachers for those who need to learn from them.

I am well aware that none of this is the 'magic bullet' that will help all soldiers overcome avoidance. While EP can be important part of this, it is not the solution for all people. We will have to learn more and maybe change how we perceive and relate to our responsibility for war trauma in our society. For instance, the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs states: "An important message for veterans already exposed to

combat violence: social support plays a critical role in reducing PTSD symptoms and increasing one's level of functioning (Price, 2007).

So I believe that taking personal responsibility and not relying on the conventional mental health field alone to help returning troops can carry a part of the solution.

Veterans are the light at the tip of the candle, illuminating the way for the whole nation...

- Thich Nath Hanh

([Click here](#) for the whole quote).

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