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RECOVERING THE SOUL

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Introduction

Over the past two issues of IJHC, we have explored the long-term effects of child abuse/neglect, and the initial steps required for recovery. A brief summary will bring the final phases into focus. People who were abused as children develop a tear in the mind-body fabric, as well as a separation of the spirit from the mind and body. In the wake of that trauma, four persisting inner states are created, namely the “wounded inner child,” the “battlefield,” the “void,” and the “inner abuser.” The last article took us through the healing of the wounded inner child and the battlefield. We are now ready to consider how to face the void and then the inner abuser. This concludes this 3-part series on adult survivors of abuse, as the total reintegration of body, mind, and spirit leads to a recovery of the soul.

Diagnosing The Void

There are few things in Medicine that I can predict with 100% certainty, but decades of experience have proven that if you were severely abused as a child, you do have an inner void. The worse the abuse was, the deeper the void will be. Many people report that they “live” at the edge of the “void” every day of their life, fearing they are about to fall in. Others feel as if they are living their life at the bottom of the void, in a state of isolation and depression. The void is the cause of many addictions, deep/dark depressions, and feelings of profound emptiness.

A simple technique will assist you in “diagnosing” your own inner void. If you were abused or neglected as a child, or even suspect that you were, try this exercise:

Close your eyes. Imagine that you are standing at the edge of a great void, a deep chasm, or canyon. If you experience the void, notice how far across it extends and how deep it goes. Notice how you feel standing at the edge of the void. Is it a bottomless pit? Now open your eyes.

If you experienced a frightening, bottomless pit while doing this brief imagery you will benefit from session work to heal the void.

In order to understand the void, we should understand its original cause, which is a lack of unconditional love. Love is the “glue” that holds us together mentally, spiritually, and even physically. Abuse is a break in the fabric of love, a break that causes not only immense mental suffering, but also weakens the immune system and causes a low-grade depression.

When working with the void, I pay close attention to biological abnormalities. Twenty or thirty years after the abuse, the immune system may collapse, giving rise to a host of chronic illnesses, especially Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) and Fibromyalgia. I have found that survivors of abuse often suffer from serious metabolic imbalances.

The void can be healed by one of three methods:

1) Marriage to someone with 100% pure, unconditional love. I have met such people, but they are extremely rare.

2) A powerful spiritual connection that allows a Higher Love to flow into you and heal the early wounds. I am not talking about a conversion experience. I am talking about an on-going, day-to-day spiritual connection with God or a Higher Power that deepens and evolves over time.

3) Undergoing the Void Imagery.

The Void Imagery

It usually takes only two sessions for people to engage in healing the void through the Void Imagery. In this imagery, people are carefully guided to the bottom of the void. Some people are so terrified of their inner void that it has taken them two or three office visits to “jump in” and begin the journey down to the bottom. I ask them to imagine a divine being, saint, or angel standing next to them. They “jump” into the void holding the hand of an angel. Without this spiritual guidance and protection, this work is too dangerous. Jumping into the void is scary for most people. Jumping in alone is even more frightening. Because the void involves a split of body, mind, and spirit, it is important to intentionally bring a spiritual presence (angel, guru, guide, or God) to help heal what is, at least in part, a major spiritual “illness.”

The bottom of the void is usually covered with tar, mud, or quicksand. One of the key steps in the healing process is to transform that murky bottom until one is “standing on solid ground.” At the moment when the murky depths are transformed, radical shifts in both mind and body take place. People say, “I can breathe again.” And the quality of their breath changes, often permanently. “Dana” experienced surges of energy, which proved to be lasting. She reported, “I feel heat rising up my spine and oxygen entering every cell in my body. It’s as if my cells have never been able to fully let oxygen in. I am in total peace and bliss.”

People return to the top of the void feeling that their life has changed ... and it has. Conquering one's inner depths is as great a feat as skydiving or bunji-jumping. Once one has had the courage to travel to the bottom of the void, and then transformed whatever needed transformation at the bottom, the void is changed from a frightening inner state to a sacred inner space that is nurturing instead of frightening. Once the initial work has been done, people can return to this sacred inner space whenever they desire.

The void will not simply close or seal over after doing void imagery work. Rather, there is a progression of healing over time. After the initial journeys, the void will not be as deep as it once was. Over the course of six months to two years, the void will entirely heal over. The imagery state of the void is gone, and the mental anguish that went with it is also gone. Feelings of profound emptiness disappear, and a deeper sense of connection to both Self and God come into existence. People feel as if they are standing on solid ground for the first time in life.

Facing the Inner Abuser

When we, as children, had abuse and rage hurled at us, we made choices about how to deal with it. Some people said to themselves, "I will never be like that when I grow up." Others became aggressive in response to the aggression. Regardless of the approach a child takes, the rageful, abusive energy enters the child and does not simply pass through and leave. Over time, the rage takes on a life of its own. It begins to assume an unconscious form, and that form hides within the individual. I call this inner part the "inner abuser." It carries a tremendous charge, like dynamite, because an entire personality has grown up to protect the individual from the inner abuser, and even from the awareness of the inner abuser. The power of the inner abuser is largely responsible for the abused child losing conscious contact with his or her soul or spirit.

The inner abuser [brings out/ develops/ produces] violent outbursts, suicide and even homicide. In less severe cases, or in people who simply have good self-control, the inner abuser will manifest by sabotaging their life in subtle and major ways. People who keep climbing the mountain of success, who approach the mountaintop, only to fall down to the bottom over and over again are often victims of their inner abuser. This force is so powerful that it will sabotage any kind of treatment. For example, in my work, I can bring a person into excellent metabolic balance, and as a result they will be feeling great. But their inner abuser can topple the metabolic improvement so severely and suddenly that they feel that they are right back where they started. The inner abuser works in subtle ways. It continues to beat up on people from the inside and drives them to repeat the same painful and self-defeating experiences.

Because of the negative energy contained within the inner abuser, I will not go near it for about six months after I have begun working with a survivor of abuse. First I must help them heal the wounded inner child, quiet down the battlefield, establish clear boundaries in life, and heal the void. After that psycho-spiritual foundation has been laid, we can approach this danger zone. If people with these problems try to heal their childhood wounds by first doing powerful emotional release work, they can be at great risk. They may be able to unleash the rage that has been buried, but without healing the void, that rage can actually grow larger rather than smaller, if the timing and pacing are wrong.

Therapy issues

It may be difficult for the reader to understand the notions of the void and the inner abuser, for I deal with them as inner realities. Because I live and work with mental imagery, I have come to know this territory and can walk through it the way someone else would walk through a regular forest. I know that these insights resonate with survivors of abuse, and I also know that this systematic method to approaching and transcending abuse actually works. To speak in non-metaphoric terms, the inner abuser "is" self-hate. It "is" self-loathing.

Before exploring the treatment and cure of the inner abuser, let's examine the role it plays. Psychoanalysis talks about people internalizing "bad objects." No, that doesn't mean that they eat knives! It means that they "mentally swallow" the person who attacked them. In some cases abused people "become" the abuser, like the very person who abused them. This was seen at the extreme in the Nazi concentration camps. Some of the prisoners took on the personality of their guards, as a way of coping with the terrifying situation. These prisoners, in turn, hounded other prisoners.

So — how to track down the inner abuser? The inner abuser lives in the vicinity of the void and is a shape-shifter. Put another way, while it is very easy to identify the void, the inner abuser is a part of us that does not want to be discovered, so it takes on different symbolic forms each time we look for it. In Native American spirituality, coyote is referred to as a shape shifter. It is nature's equivalent of the inner abuser. I cannot yet explain the power and grip that the inner abuser has, and why it changes form and hides. All I know is that this very powerful part does not want to go out of existence. It hangs on to us, and we hang on to it.

The inner abuser might take the form of a menacing tiger, a weapon, fire, a monster, or the person who actually was abusive. Once the void is healed, begin to look for the inner abuser in the remnants of the void. There are two approaches to dealing with the inner abuser. The first is to bring in a force so powerful that it annihilates it or burns it to ash. This calls for serious inner warfare. I prefer the second, a process of dialoguing with the inner abuser, asking what it wants and what purpose it serves in your life.

I ask my clients to get in touch with how they feel about the inner abuser, and then I might say, "In your mind, tell it how you feel. You're safe now, so you can tell it anything that you want."

Usually the adult survivor wants to kill the inner abuser. I advise them to say this verbally rather than directly "killing" the inner abuser. As painful as it is, deep healing takes place by entering into a dialogue with the inner abuser, a dialogue that will continue for many months. Remember that initially the inner abuser will shape shift. However, after concerted effort and many inner journeys to face this part, it will finally stabilize and its form will remain consistent. Eventually, it will begin to lose its energy, will shrink in size, and then either disappear or transform into something beautiful.

At this point, the survivor of abuse has finally recovered her mind . . . and her soul. All her fragmented inner parts come together, and a deep peace will set in for the first time in life. As the entire struggle leaves her, she will experience deep self-love for the first time, and will also begin to love others in an entirely new and whole way.

In summary

Healing the residues of abuse is a very long journey. I would not tell anyone that they could be healed of the wounds of child abuse in a few months or even a year. Once they have learned the tools for handling these inner states, they must commit to doing serious inner work for years. There is no question in my mind that survivors of abuse, including those with borderline personality disorder, can be fully healed. What is required is tremendous courage, faith in their ability to master their inner world, and the determination to keep going until the goal has been attained. That final goal is not just peace of mind and reintegration of the torn mind-body "fabric." Recovering the soul is the final achievement that confers lasting healing.

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