

Study Guide:

The Little Book of Trauma Healing

By Carolyn Yoder

Before you begin these questions, here is more on the philosophy underlying the ideas in this *Little Book*:

When communities or entire societies experience traumatic events or live with constant unrest, individuals are impacted. Many will bounce back without help or intervention. Others will require or benefit from mental health services. Under the health-care system in the United States, these services are usually one-on-one and deal with the symptoms resulting from the trauma: difficulty eating, sleeping, or concentrating; flashbacks to the event; anxiety; fear; depression, etc. This is known as the medical model of trauma: it is a Western model and it is useful and needed by some people

A psychosocial approach to trauma healing looks at more than the mental health effects of a trauma. It looks at the close relationship between the *psychological* and *social* effects of trauma and/or violence. The psychological effect refers to how the experiences impact emotions, thoughts, behavior, memory, learning, and the meaning we make of an event. The social effects refer to how the traumatic experiences affect and alter people's relationships with each other. This can include death; separation; estrangement; and losses of jobs, economic or educational opportunity, status, land, and community. With this, we at STAR include the spiritual impact on individuals or groups. So the STAR approach might be thought of as psychosocial-spiritual

We believe that trauma work and healing in turbulent times needs to attend to mind, body, and spirit. We also believe that both individual welfare and social justice must be addressed if there is to be long-term healing. We believe that that healing work must take into account both the current situation, and the underlying root causes which lead to violence and harm. This is true even in situations of natural disasters, which often reveal conflicts that have festered for years. We believe that there are ways of dealing with conflict that are neither passive nor violent. We also believe that the best trauma work is curative as well as preventative. Thus, when responding to a traumatic event or situation of ongoing trauma, the goal is twofold:

- a) To keep traumatic reactions from escalating during turbulent times, and
- b) To determine and work at root causes to prevent the trauma from happening again

This is the core of the STAR model and philosophy presented in this *Little Book*. STAR is a work in progress. Join us, by sending your feedback, insights, and ideas. Write to us at star-book@emu.edu

Chapter 1: Introduction

Think about and describe situations that you have experienced, witnessed, or know from the media in which traumatic events have led to subsequent violence either by individuals or groups.

Chapter 2: Defining Trauma: The Causes and Types

Activity: If you're doing this study guide as an individual, draw a symbol of trauma, something that has impacted you. It can be a personal event, or something more global.

If you're working through the study guide in a group, ask each person in advance to bring a symbol of trauma. Give time for each to briefly share what the symbol represents or the story behind it. The symbol can be an object or a work of art or music. Another approach is to give the group time to draw a symbol or write about a trauma, then provide opportunity for each person to talk about it. If the group is large, you may want to divide into groups of five or six for this sharing. At STAR, as the symbols of trauma are presented, the group receives them in a respectful, holding silence.

It is important that no one is pressured to participate in this activity.

End this part of the activity with physical stretching; some calisthenics; or a brief, brisk walk. Then use the following study questions as a way of debriefing:

1. What were your reactions--physical, emotional, cognitive (thinking)--as the symbols were shared?
2. Review the various types of trauma presented in Chapter 2:
 - A traumatic event(s) for an individual
 - Societal or collective trauma
 - Ongoing trauma
 - Structurally-induced trauma
 - Historical trauma
 - Secondary trauma
 - Participation-induced trauma (PIT)

What types of trauma were represented by the symbols presented in your group?

Were any of the above types of trauma surprising?

Are there other types or causes of trauma that you would add?

3. The issues MacNair raises regarding participation-induced traumatic stress may also have significant relevancy to communities, groups, and nations and may raise troubling questions. What are the emotional and spiritual implications for a group or society that bears responsibility for events such as the holocaust, genocide, My Lai, Abu Ghraib, suicide bombings, state-supported assassinations, and torture? Do the traumatic effects boomerang back, not only onto the lower-level individuals who are often held responsible and prosecuted, but onto the conscience and soul of a nation as well? How does facing or denying PITS affect our politics? Our spiritual health as individuals or societies?
4. As noted, the trouble with trying to define trauma is that it currently is used for everything from a tick bite to a fatal car accident to genocide. Because the study of trauma is relatively new, at times we lack adequate vocabulary to talk about it. Someone has said there are "big T" Traumas and "little t" traumas. Discuss the definition used here. Do you agree that what distinguishes stress or distress from trauma is that trauma overwhelms our usual ability to cope in some way--body, mind, and spirit?
5. Would you add or delete anything from the list of common traumatic events or situations listed at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 3: Common Responses to Traumatic Events

1. Neurobiology, the branch of biology that deals with the anatomy, physiology, and pathology of the nervous system, is a rapidly growing field with many practical applications for daily life.

Relate a time when your body went into high gear and your brain went into low. This can happen with something as common as an argument with a friend or as frightening as a car accident. What was it like for you?

Read Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell's brilliant book on parenting (even if you aren't a parent) or Steven Johnson's entertaining and highly readable book to gain a deeper understanding of how this operates on a day-to-day basis, as well as during traumatic events. [Daniel J. Siegel and Mary Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive* (New York City: Penguin, 2003), and Steven Johnson, *Mind Wide Open* (New York: Scribner, 2004).]

Understanding high- and low-mode brain functioning during the ordinary events of life is of enormous practical help on a daily basis. That knowledge and practice in the little things will stand us in good stead when we are faced with traumatic reactions.

2. Reflect on the victim/survivor cycle in relation to your own (or your community's, or nation's) traumatic experience(s). Invoke *facts, feelings, thoughts, physiological reactions, behaviors, and anything else* that resulted. Does the cycle ring true to what you experienced?
3. Have you experienced something that is not presented in the cycle? If so, how would you change the cycle?
4. Relate a trauma you have experienced. Do the justice needs of victims listed in the chapter reflect the needs you had/have as a result of the trauma? • Safety
 - Information, answers
 - Story/truth-telling
 - Empowerment
 - Vindication
 - Restitution
5. Judith Herman says (page 27) that those who experience single traumas feel like they have lost their minds, but those who experience multiple traumas feel like they have lost themselves. If you have experienced multiple traumas, does this description fit your experience? Explain.
6. Peter Levine and others point out that human beings are one of the only species that kills other members of the species. Vamik Volkan says the most difficult traumas are those deliberately caused by others. Discuss these statements.
7. Chosen traumas (page 20) become part of an individual's or group's identity. Have you seen this happen? What are the results?
8. If you are a leader or caregiver, you may have heard stories of personal trauma. How were lives affected or changed? How were you changed by working with those who were traumatized? What kind of comfort or counseling did you offer at the time? How did your own life experiences and skills help (or hinder) your ability to care for the person or persons?

Chapter 4: Continuing the Cycles: Unhealed Trauma

1. "Pain that is not transformed is transferred." Give examples of when you have seen or experienced this happening to individuals, groups, and societies and across generations.
2. The chart on page 33 lists some of the common ways individuals and societies re-enact trauma. Often families, organizations, and societies try to treat these behaviors themselves rather than recognizing trauma as a root cause, and providing interventions that support trauma healing. For example, prisons are full of people whose stories could be told around the trauma cycle on page 38. Substance abusers often have traumatic histories. What changes would need to be made in organizations and communities if we viewed these issues through a trauma lens?
3. Trauma healing is hard work. Healthy grieving and mourning is a key to healing trauma. What in your culture or subculture supports-or does not support-a healthy grieving and mourning process? What could be done at organizational or community levels to lend support to those who have experienced trauma and need to mourn? Have we recognized the seriousness of ignoring grief work?
4. Re-read the section on the aggressor cycle (pages 38-43). How have you seen this cycle playing out in your family, community, or nation? Why do you think individuals and groups so easily accept good-versus-evil narratives without looking deeper? Do you agree that the "myth of redemptive violence" is really a myth, or do you believe there are times when violence does save us, not only in the short term but in the long term? Is your answer to this question an emotional or rational response? Tell a story of what from your own history and experience brings you to your position on this issue?

Chapter 5: Breaking the Cycles: The Journey to Healing and Security

1. What is the significance of the word "journey" as we talk about the "affective and spiritual" reconstruction needed to work toward healing and security?
2. Individuals, groups, and nations perpetuate cycles of violence in the name of security. How would you define safety? Security? Do you know persons who "act well in spite of threat?" What is the source of their courage? How would they explain how they became resilient? Do they point to resources that helped them along the way? How do they express their strength? Consider ways to amplify that resilience so others can benefit.

3. Give examples of positive leadership you have observed in times of crisis that did not depend on or increase cycles of violence. What were the positive characteristics of the leadership? How does your list compare with Volkan's on pages 52-53?
4. Note that the steps on the outer ring of the model, Trauma Healing Journey: Breaking the Cycles of Victimhood and Violence, is a counterbalance to the victim and aggressor cycles (inner circle on the model). For example, accepting loss contacts shock and denial, and acknowledging that the other side has a story counteracts dehumanization.
5. After harm, forgiving and reconciliation are often some of the first acts advocated by religious leaders. Notice where these two concepts fall on the model. Although human beings do not heal in neat, linear steps, it is a roadmap, and the earlier steps make forgiveness and reconciliation more likely.
6. The Beatitudes of Jesus comprise one of the best known passages in Christian scripture. One beatitude is, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Consider this seeming paradox in light of trauma healing.
7. Acknowledgment is hard work. Not only does it encompass owning all aspects of our own story, it requires the difficult work of acknowledging that the other also has a story. Consider the three questions of Fr. Michael Lapsley:
 - a. What was done to me/us?
 - b. What did I/we do to others?
 - c. What did I/we failed to do?

Reflect on these questions as applied to a situation now or in the past where you experienced difficulty or betrayal. This is spiritual work of the deepest sort. (Note the caveat that these questions do not apply to situations such as child abuse. However, might they be applied to our *adult* responses to childhood situations?)

8. Forgiving is a sensitive and conflicted subject. What questions, struggles, or triumphs have you had with forgiving?
9. A justice that restores relationships is more than punishment, or getting what we deserve. How would you define justice? Would your definition take into consideration the justice needs of victims identified in Chapter 3:
 - safety
 - information, answers
 - story/truth-telling
 - empowerment
 - vindication
 - restitution

10. Consider the model in light of your spiritual beliefs or tradition.

What scriptures, stories, and theological understandings from your religious tradition and sacred texts come to mind as you reflect on the model?

What would you add to the model that reflect your faith understandings, and where? For example: confession, vindication, mercy, etc.

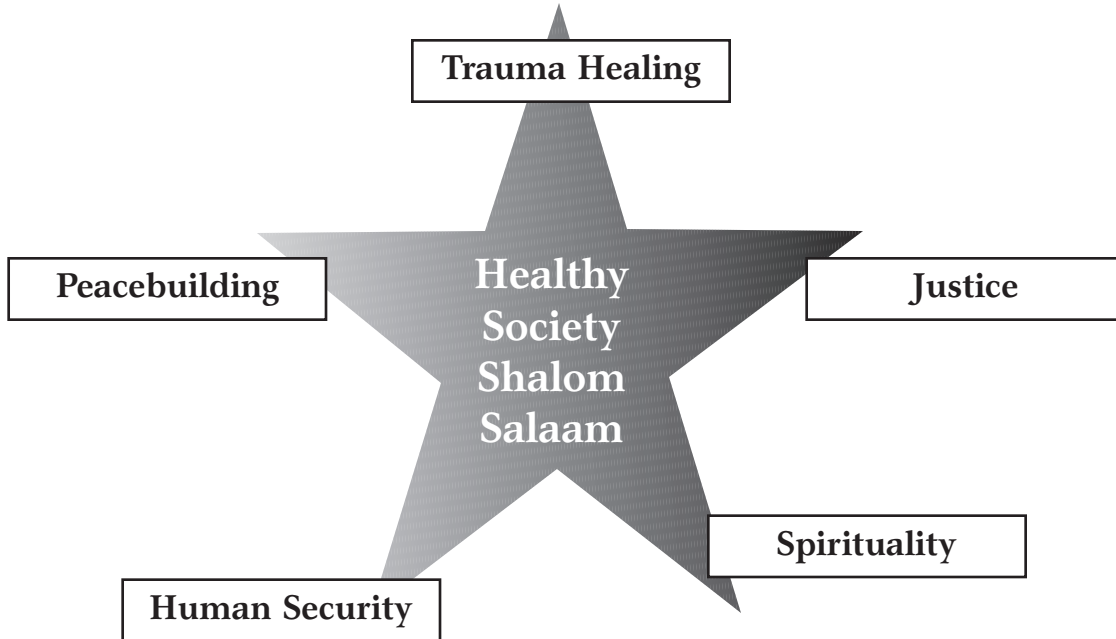
How might your faith practice alter the model? What changes would you make?

11. The model can be used as a guide or roadmap for individuals or groups. It can also be used as an assessment tool to gauge where people are in their journey. For example, are they stuck in the inner cycles, or have they broken out? Were they previously working on healing, only to have other events happen that threw them back into the inner cycles of victim hood and violence? Think of yourself, your community, your nation. Where are they on this model?
12. The bottom line question: Is this healing journey model do-able? Is it possible? Will families, communities, groups, or societies find ways to heal and stop cycles of victimhood and violence? What do you think?

Chapter 6: What if? 9/11 and Breaking the Cycles

1. If you are from the U.S., consider the "what if" question in chapter 6. If you are from another country, ask "what if" questions relevant to a difficult security-related situation relevant to your country.
2. Ask "what if" questions relevant to a personal situation you now face, or have faced. If you were writing a book of your life story, what would the chapter titles be? Think of titles that reflect the past, the present struggle, and the future (write the future questions as if they had already happened). Would your story end with you whirling in cycles of victimhood or violence, or on a healing journey? What would be the title of your book? Write the "about the author" blurb. (The "writing the book" exercise is from Nancy Good Sider.)

Chapter 7: How Then Shall We Live?



1. The five-pointed STAR depicts entry points for beginning discussions with an end to building healthy communities and societies. What is the beginning entry point you would use in your community? Why?
2. At a practical individual, group, or societal level, how much do you know about the different ways to "wage peace" as a way to security? An excellent practical resource, in addition to Coleman McCarthy's writings, is *Engage: Exploring Non-Violent Living*, available from Pace e Bene (www.EngageNonviolence.org, telephone 702-648-2281). Engage is "a study program for learning, practicing, and experimenting with the power of creative nonviolence to transform our lives and our world. The easy-to-follow facilitator directions in the manual make it user-friendly for group study.
3. This chapter lists six suggestions for living in ways that contribute to breaking cycles of victimhood and violence in our world. Which one (or ones) challenge(s) you most? What other suggestions would you add?

We hope that this *Little Book* and study guide have been helpful and healing for you. We welcome feedback on how this has been helpful for you, including suggestions for additions or changes. Write to us at starbook@emu.edu or at STAR, Eastern Mennonite University, 1200 Park Road, Harrisonburg, VA. 22802