



Trauma and the Healing Force of Warmth

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More and more people are experiencing upheaval and uncertainty, and feeling as though they are standing on the brink of an abyss. In September, the Medical Section's annual conference – Standing on the Abyss: Trauma, Development and Resilience – will bring these themes into focus. The Section leaders share their insights with us, in a three-part series.

Physical trauma refers to an injury to the body caused by violent force. Soul trauma refers to a severe psychological shock that usually continues to work in the unconscious for a long time. We can describe the wound resulting from trauma in great detail at the physical level: How deep is the wound? Is it bleeding? How heavily? Which tissues are affected? Is it a scratch, a superficial abrasion, a tear, a gunshot, stab, or bite wound? Is the wound fresh or old, inflamed, scabbed over, or scarred? Does it lead to hardening, and does it affect functionality? At this point, we encounter the second level of the organism, the vital functions, or, in anthroposophical terminology, the etheric body with its healing capacities for the physical body. We consider whether any circulation of fluids has been interrupted and which tissues may have died as a result. Which organ rhythms are disrupted? What forces impaired? How does the wound heal, and how will the system, in the best-case scenario, regenerate to its former wholeness?

When we experience the quality, depth, and intensity of pain, but also of anger or shame, we have reached the level of the astral body, the seat of sensation. Even when there's no reason to, many people ask themselves, "Did I somehow help to bring this misfortune upon myself?" Depending on the wound, the astral level can be involved to a greater or lesser degree. However, it is a much more difficult realm to investigate – and can even be dangerous, for compassion actually entails touching upon vulnerabilities and wounds. Some wounds occur purely in the realm of the soul without us really being aware and can therefore remain hidden, perhaps even since childhood. Shame often plays a role here, for example, in experiences of abuse. Do soul wounds also leave behind scars and torn-apart relationships in our soul? Do they still bleed sometimes or get inflamed? How do these wounds affect the daily functioning of our soul? How long will they last? How deep is the pain? Has someone become numb to this pain and no longer even sense that it still exists? Have they lost consciousness of it entirely?

Even more difficult are questions of the 'I' and 'I'-organization. How do we experience trauma within our very personality or in the core of our being? Distinguishing between the 'I' and the 'I'-organization can be helpful. The activity that the 'I' manifests in our organism is warmth. What happens to this warmth after a

trauma? Is it still there? Do we find pockets of cold or areas of overheating? Is our body's own warmth still able to adapt properly to environmental conditions? Feeling cold and looking pale are indications of profound traumatic experiences; the 'I' has become detached from its healthy connection with the organism.

The precise description of the physical state of an injury serves as an archetype for all other levels. It often helps us better understand scarring and other lasting damage, and what is curable and what is incurable. We see fractures, tears, broken connections, and the loss of vitality, strength, adaptability, and warmth at every level. As physicians, therapists, and alternative practitioners, but also as patients, how can we deepen our work so that the reality of true healing occurs on all levels?

Warmth Heals

It is not difficult to imagine warmth as a healing element. We all have positive experiences of warmth. A steady source of warmth envelops us even before birth and is essential for survival after birth. Any loss of body heat in a premature infant significantly reduces the chances of healthy survival. We cool an injury only during the acute phase to stop bleeding and relieve pain. Warmth then paves the way for the healing life forces and re-connects us with our body and soul. Warmth is the element capable of permeating, transforming, and bringing all other elements into fluid motion. On the soul level, warmth corresponds to human closeness, affection, and love, which all have a healing effect. Warmth dissolves stiffness and rigidity. Warmth rises, counteracting gravity. External applications using ointments, oils, or teas have a much more intense and profound effect when administered with warmth.

The idea that we first have to "warm up" to something or someone is a very apt expression for these processes of the 'I' as it reconnects or forms new connections. We therefore create especially effective and lasting approaches to healing through specific applications of warmth that allow the components of our being to interpenetrate and come together. This is similar to the process of the 'I' organizing itself within the body during incarnation. When the right warmth is present, we arrive healthier at birth – but we also weather every crisis better thereafter. Infectious diseases have a better prognosis when we are able to develop a proper fever.

To counteract trauma, we need a warmth of will, both as a preventive measure and as a healing force. Tissue with good blood circulation heals faster. People who regularly warm up their bodies through exercise or fill themselves with warm enthusiasm have a stronger immune system and are less prone to depression. People who live in warm social relationships and nurture them well are more resilient and heal better.

Translation: Joshua Kelberman

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