

fall; the pendulum-swing manifests in everything; the measure of the swing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates." The application of this perennial philosophy to trauma is the very principle that allows sensations and feelings which have previously overwhelmed people to be processed and transformed in the present. In doing this, trauma transformed can approach Kabalistic enlightenment.

TRAUMA, DEATH, AND SUFFERING

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil . . .

—*Psalm 23*

It would be an error to equate trauma with suffering, and suffering in turn with transformation. At the same time, however, in virtually every spiritual tradition suffering is understood as a doorway to awakening. In the West, this connection can be seen in the biblical story of Job, and magnificently in the Twenty-third Psalm. It is found as the dark night of the soul in medieval mysticism, and of course in the passion of Christ. In Buddhism an important distinction is made between suffering and unnecessary suffering. According to the Buddha, "When touched with a feeling of pain, the ordinary person laments . . . becomes distraught . . . contracts . . . so he feels two pains . . . just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another . . . so that he would feel the pains of two arrows . . ." Trauma sufferers are so frightened of their bodily sensations that they recoil from feeling them. It is as though they believe that by feeling them they will be destroyed or at least it will make things worse. Hence they remain stuck. In this way, they shoot themselves with the second arrow. With support and guidance, however, they are able to gradually learn to befriend and transform their trauma-based sensations.

In several Eastern (Buddhist and Taoist) traditions, four pathways are said to lead to spiritual awakening (Pema Chödrön). The first is death. A second route to freedom from unnecessary human suffering can come from many years of austere meditative contemplation. The third gateway to liberation is through special forms of (tantric) sexual ecstasy. And the fourth portal is said, by these traditions, to be trauma. Meditation, Sex, Death, and Trauma, in serving as great portals, share a common element. They are all potential catalysts for profound surrender.

Evidence suggests that the physiological root of trauma occurs when the organism is overwhelmed and immobilized.¹⁴ This occurred when the four-year-old Nancy was terrified and held down for her tonsillectomy. These death-like states lie at the root of trauma. The ability to feel the physical sensations of paralysis (without becoming overwhelmed) is the key in transforming trauma. When we are able to "touch into" that death-like void, even briefly (rather than recoil from it), the immobilization releases. In this way the second arrow of unnecessary suffering is eliminated. The "standing back" from fear allows the individual to emerge from the strangulation of trauma. As people "experience into" the paralysis sensations (in the absence of fear), they contact the "mini-deaths" which lie at the eye of the hurricane, at the very heart of trauma. This visitation is an opportunity to enter the rich portal of death. It is well known that many people who have had near death experiences (NDEs) undergo positive personality transformations. With a therapist's help, traumatized individuals are encouraged and supported to feel into the immobility/NDE states, liberating these primordial archetypal energies while integrating them into consciousness.

In addition, the "awe-full" states of horror and terror appear to be connected to the transformative states such as awe, presence, timelessness, and ecstasy. They share essential psychophysiological and phenomenological roots. For example,

stimulating of the amygdala (the brain's smoke detector for danger and rage) can also evoke the experience of ecstasy and bliss.¹⁵ This seems to support an approach that guides individuals through their awe-full feelings of fear and horror toward those of joy, goodness, and awe.

Newberg and his colleagues¹⁶ have, in their seminal book, *Why God Won't Go Away*, brought together a vast amount of research on the brain substrates underlying a variety of different spiritual experiences. The application of this type of brain research to trauma transformation is a rich area worthy of further research and exploration.

REGULATION AND THE SELF

As Below, So Above —*The Kabilyon*

The autonomic nervous system (ANS) gets its name from being a relatively autonomous¹⁷ branch of the nervous system. Its basic, yet highly integrated function has to do with the regulation of energy states and the maintenance of homeostasis. The ANS is composed of two distinctly different branches.¹⁸ Its sympathetic branch supports overall energy mobilization. If you are physically cold, perceive threat, or are sexually aroused, the sympathetic nervous system increases the metabolic rate and prepares you for action. The parasympathetic branch, on the other hand, promotes rest, relaxation, gestation, nurturance, and restitution of tissue and cellular function.

When the level of activation of the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system is very low, we are apt to be feeling somewhat lethargic. At moderate levels of sympathetic activity, we are generally doing or preparing to do something active.¹⁹ This level of arousal is usually experienced as being alert, as well as pleurably excited. In this realm there is typically a smooth back-and-forth shifting between moderate levels of sympathetic and parasympathetic

activity serving a balanced physiological state called homeostasis. I call this flexible, seesaw, shifting range of arousal, "relaxed alertness." The following drama on an uplands meadow illustrates this:

A herd of deer grazes in a forest clearing. A twig snaps. Instantly, the deer are alert, ready to flee into the forest. Each animal becomes still. Muscles tensed, they listen and sniff the air, attempting to pinpoint the source of the sound (orientation). Deeming it insignificant, they return to leisurely chewing on their afternoon repast, cleaning and nurturing their young, and warming themselves in the early morning sun. Another stimulus sends the animals back into the state of alertness and heightened vigilance, once again ready to flee or fight. Seconds later, again having found no actual threat, the deer again resume their former activity.

By watching the deer carefully through binoculars, one can sometimes witness the transition from the state of activated vigilance to one of normal, relaxed activity. When the animals' instinct determines that they are not in danger, they may begin to vibrate, twitch, and lightly tremble. This process begins with a very slight twitching or vibration in the upper part of the neck around the ears and spreads down into the chest, shoulders, and then finally down into the abdomen, pelvis, and hind legs. These little "tremblings" of muscular tissue are the organism's way of regulating extremely high states of nervous system activation toward relaxation and quiescence. The deer move through this rhythmic cycle dozens, perhaps hundreds, of times a day. This cycle, between sympathetic and parasympathetic dominance, occurs each time they are activated.²⁰ The animals move easily and rhythmically between states of relaxed alertness and tensed vigilance. And while I try to minimize "zoomorphism" (the wholesale attribution of

animal characteristics to humans), it is not difficult to imagine the profound difference in people's lives when they are no longer "stuck" in traumatic hypervigilance but are deeply at home with their energy shifts. They know (not from their minds but from their whole organisms) that whatever they experience not only will pass, but will enrich their lives, adding energy, passion, and focus.

In mammals, this capacity for self-regulation is essential. It endows the animal with the capability to make fluid shifts in internal bodily states to meet changes in the external environment. Animals with developed orbito-frontal systems have evolved the capacity to switch between different emotional states. This ability (known as affect-regulation) allows animals to vary their emotions to appropriately match environmental demands. According to Schore and others, this highly evolved adaptive function is the basis for the core sense of self in humans.²¹ These same circuits in the orbito-frontal cortex receive inputs from the muscles, joints, and viscera. The sensations that form the inner landscape of the body are mapped in the orbitofrontal portions of the brain.²² Hence as we are able to change our body sensations we change the highest function of our brains. Emotional regulation (our rudder through life) comes about through embodiment.

EMBODIMENT

For in my flesh I shall see God. —Book of Job

Cry for the soul

that will not face the body as an equal place . . . —Dory Previn song

Traumatized people are fragmented and disembodied. The constriction of feeling obliterates shade and texture, turning everything into good/bad, black/white, for us or against us.

It is the unspoken hell of traumatization. In order to know who and where we are in space and to feel that we are vital-alive beings, subtleties are essential. Furthermore, it is not just acutely traumatized individuals who are disembodied; most Westerners share a less dramatic but still impairing disconnection from their inner sensate compasses. Given the magnitude of the primordial and raw power of our instincts, the historical role of the church and other cultural institutions in subjugating the body is hardly surprising.

In contrast, various (embodied) spiritual traditions have acknowledged the "baser instincts" not as something to be eliminated, but rather as a force in need of, and available for, transformation. In Vipassana meditation and various traditions of Tantric Buddhism (such as Kum Nye), the goal is "to manifest the truly human spiritual qualities of universal goodwill, kindness, humility, love, equanimity and so on."²³ These traditions, rather than renouncing the body, utilize it as a way to "refine" the instincts. The essence of embodiment is not in repudiation, but in living the instincts fully as they dance in the "body electric," while at the same time harnessing their primordial raw energies to promote increasingly subtle qualities of experience.²⁴

As the song by Dory Previn suggests, mystical experiences that are not experienced in the body just don't "stick"; they are not grounded. Trauma sufferers live in a world of chronic dissociation. This perpetual state of disembodiment keeps them disoriented and unable to engage in the here-and-now. Trauma survivors, however, are not alone in being disembodied; a lower level of disembodiment is widespread in modern culture.

A distinction is made in the German language between the word "korper," meaning a physical body, and "leib," which translates into English as the "lived (or living) body." The term "lieb" reveals a much deeper generative meaning compared with

the purely physical "korper" (not unlike "corpse"). A gift of trauma *recovery* is the rediscovery of the living, sensing, knowing body. The poet and writer D.H. Lawrence inspires with this reflection on the living, knowing body: "Our body is how we know that we are alive, alive to the depths of our souls and in touch somewhere with the vivid reaches of the cosmos."

Trauma sufferers, in their healing journeys, learn to dissolve their rigid defenses. In this surrender they move from frozen fixity to gentle thaw and free flow. In healing the divided self from its habitual mode of dissociation, they move from fragmentation to wholeness. In becoming embodied they return from their long exile in the desert of trauma. They come home to their bodies and know embodied life, as though for the first time. While trauma is hell on earth, its resolution may be a gift from the "gods."

T.S. Eliot seems to have grasped this hero's journey of awakening through deep exploration in his epic poem "Little Gidding":

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*