

What Does It Mean to be a People of Healing?

Tom Hook, November 8, 2020

Quote - bell hooks (author & social activist)

Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion.

Healing is an act of communion? Let's ponder that a bit.... Here we are in the midst of a worldwide pandemic of Covid-19, racial and civil unrest, economic uncertainty, and just five days from one to the most vicious, divisive elections in history and we hear from bell hooks that healing is an act of communion?

I believe that for any of us to heal, or to aid in the healing of others, we must take a broad, holistic approach combining all the resources available to us.

Let's face it....we are in time of great disruption, and without the inner work of contemplation (or mindfulness) and the outer work of action (in community) we stand the chance of seeing society, as we have known it, devolve into further chaos. We must heal in order to survive as a species and as a planet.

From the late Fr. Thomas Keating we hear these parting words: "The only path forward for the survival of our species and perhaps even our planet is a path of nonviolence, of contemplation and action prioritizing justice and solidarity, an affirmation of Oneness and the interconnectedness of all things, which science confirms, and spirituality has always known on its deepest level."

So where might we begin to examine healing and being healed?

In an article by Paul Levy, (author of The Quantum Revelation), he states, "One of the deeper, underlying archetypal patterns, which is being constellated in the human psyche, that is playing out collectively on the world stage, is the archetype of the "wounded healer". It refers psychologically to the capacity "to be at home in the darkness and there find the germs of light and recovery". It is only by being willing to face, consciously experience, and go through our hurt or wound do we receive its blessing. Going through and processing our wound teaches us

something about ourselves. Part of our old self “dies” in the process, while a new, more expansive and empowered part of ourselves is potentially born.

I would suggest that this process of “knowing ourselves” and facing our “shadow self” are critical in our efforts to not only to heal ourselves, but to aid in healing others and the world. You have heard me say before that those traits we find irritating in others are likely the same traits that are the living embodiment of the “shadow self” within us.

These traits, hurts, rage that lie beneath the surface of our conscious self surely will appear consciously when we least expect it. Have you ever experienced an outburst and then thought, “where did that come from!”

Richard Rohr, founder of the Center for Action & Contemplation, insists,

“Pain that is not TRANSFORMED is TRANSFERRED!! (repeat)

All of us experience the tragic, the nonsensical, the unjust, but we know not all of us experience the pain in the same way. If we could see these wounds as the way through, then they would become “sacred wounds” and not something we deny, disguise, or export to others.

If we cannot transmute our wounds into sacred wounds, we invariably become cynical, negative, or bitter. Rohr suggests that this might be the major task of religion, because we WILL be wounded, sooner or later. Suffering is part of the deal, as the Buddha taught.

It is here that we enter Liminal Space.....

Into this liminal realm, between the known and the unknown, we are invited to enter if we are to learn more of the way forward in our lives as individuals and as communities and nations.

Worlds conjoin in the twilight. It is the coming together of masculine and the feminine. It is the convergence of the unseen world of those who have gone before us and this present dimension of space and time in which the seen and the physical dominate.

It may be a time of encountering messengers from the invisible realms of the universe that are linked intricately to our realm, but at the same time transcend us in our struggle with unknown forces of darkness within and without.

When we find ourselves in liminal space, does it matter whether we are pushed or whether we jumped?

Either way, we are not where or what we were before, nor do we know how or where we will land in our new reality. We are betwixt and between. In that space—which is mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual—we are destabilized, disoriented. The old touchstones, habits, and comforts are now past, the future unknown. We only wish such a time to be over. We may be impatient to pass through it quickly, with as little distress as possible, even though that is not likely.

. . .

But what if we can choose to experience this liminal space and time, this uncomfortable now, as . . . a place and state of creativity, of construction and deconstruction, choice and transformation? It invites us to lay down our fears and discomfort to see what else is there, hard as that may be. . . .

Like mythical Jonah in the belly of the sea monster, we are led where we do not want to go—not once, but many times in our lives. Dwelling in unsettling liminal space, whether we are pushed or we jump, we are led to draw on resources and possibilities we may not have tapped before. In the unknown space between here and there, younger and older, past and future, life happens.

In liminal time and space, we can learn to let reality—even in its darkness—be our teacher. We can enter into the liminal paradox: a disturbing time and space that not only breaks us down, but also offers us the choice to live in it with fierce aliveness, freedom, sacredness, companionship, and awareness of Presence.

John Philip Newell, a poet and scholar writes:

- “Do we know that within each one of us is the unspeakably beautiful beat of the Sacred?”

- Do we know that we can honor that Sacredness in one another and in everything that has being?
- And do we know that this combination—growing in awareness that we are bearers of Presence, along with a faithful commitment to honor that Presence in one another and in the earth—holds the key to transformation in our world? . . .”

Again, we either TRANSFORM our Emotions or TRANSFER THEM! – usually to our family, our neighbors, our community, our nation, and our world.

Over the past eight months we have had much to process. I must admit that this has been an emotional and psychological roller coaster for me. Beginning with fear and anxiety of this unknown virus, followed by outrage at the murder of George Floyd, disgust with the rise of White Supremacy, and pure anger with the state of government in our country. When writing this talk, I struggled with my own ability to heal and how to aid in healing others.

I guess in many ways I am writing this talk for myself. I need to do more than talk about it. I need to “do the work”! I need to “do the work” of getting in touch with the wounds deep in my psyche and find the path to light and recovery. Then, and only then, can I begin the work of healing - in my Self, our community, our country, our world. I must navigate my journey in this time of Liminal Space with hope and trust in “The Great Turning” that is happening...

Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, in Kitchen Table Wisdom, writes:

“The healing of our present woundedness may lie in recognizing and reclaiming the capacity we all have to heal each other, the enormous power in the simplest of human relationships: the strength of a touch, the blessing of forgiveness, the grace of someone else taking you just as you are and finding in you an unsuspected goodness... Everyone alive has suffered. It is the wisdom gained from our wounds and from our own experiences of suffering that makes us able to heal. Wounded people can best be healed by other wounded people. Only other

wounded people can understand what is needed, for the healing of suffering is compassion, not expertise.”

- She goes on: “Wounding and healing are not opposites. They’re part of the same thing.
- It is our wounds that enable us to be compassionate with the wounds of others.
- It is our limitations that make us kind to the limitations of other people. I believe I have served people perfectly well with parts of myself I used to be ashamed of.”

When we encounter situations that require help and healing they may very well look and feel like the opposite. We may feel resistance welling up within us.

Renowned Buddhist Nun and Meditation Master Pema Chödrön writes:

“A further sign of health is that we don't become undone by fear and trembling, but we take it as a message that it's time to stop struggling and look directly at what's threatening us.”

Most of us do not take these situations as teachings. We automatically hate them. We run like crazy. We use all kinds of ways to escape --- all addictions stem from this moment when we meet our edge and we just can't stand it. We feel we have to soften it, pad it with something, and we become addicted to whatever it is that seems to ease the pain.

One very effective way to be present to the moment is Tonglen

As many of you know, “Tonglen means "taking in and sending out". This meditation practice is designed to help ordinary people like ourselves connect with the openness and softness of our hearts. Instead of shielding and protecting our soft spot, with tonglen, we could let ourselves feel what it is to be human.”

Each of us has a "soft spot": the place in our experience where we feel vulnerable and tender. This soft spot is inherent in appreciation and love, and it is equally inherent in pain.

Often, when we feel that soft spot, it's quickly followed by a feeling of fear and an involuntary, habitual tendency to close down. This is the tendency of all living things: to avoid pain and cling to pleasure. In practice, however, covering up the soft spot means shutting down against our life experience. Then we tend to narrow down into a solid feeling of self against the other.

In Tonglen practice, when we see or feel suffering, we breathe in with the notion of completely feeling it, accepting it, and owning it. Then we breathe out, radiating compassion, loving kindness, freshness; anything that encourages relaxation and openness.

Pema encourages Tonglen, on the spot.

For example, you're walking down the street and you see the pain of another human being. On-the-spot Tonglen means that you just don't rush by; you actually breathe in with the wish that this person can be free of suffering and send them out some kind of good heart or well-being.

An excellent practice!

Another practice of compassion and healing is Jewish practice of Tikkun Olam

Lawrence Fine wrote this in Time Magazine:

In the wake of the mass shooting in 2018 at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, many in the Jewish community invoked the language of tikkun olam in their response to this tragedy. These Hebrew words are typically translated as “repair the world,” or “mend the world,” — or as those who knew one of the victims that day put it, “heal the world.” The phrase tikkun olam, as it has been used especially by American Jews, who identify as socially and politically progressive, expresses the conviction that the world is in urgent need of being set right.

Numerous Jewish organizations seek to relieve the suffering of all people in need, regardless of religion, ethnicity or nationality. That is to say - they are universalistic in their humanitarian commitments.

From the Christian tradition of transformation and healing, I would like to introduce you to the Welcoming Prayer

The Welcoming Prayer is relatively new. It's not an ancient practice, though it's an ancient idea.

If you are struggling with a bad feeling, this method offers a structured way to embrace and accept it, so you can release it and move on.

There are three phases to the Welcoming Prayer:

The first is Focus and Sink In: This is not about indulging bad feelings. It's not about amplifying them or justifying them. It's about FEELING the FEELING. Allow yourself to become immersed in it. Let it wash over you. Don't run away from it or fight it. Just feel what it's like to be experiencing it.

Feel the emotion physically. Notice your body, how you are tense or anxious – hot or fidgety – perhaps lethargic. As with meditation, you are just observing the feeling not trying to alter it.

Second is the Welcome: We can only move forward if we accept where we are. Now affirm the rightness of where you are by welcoming the bad feeling or emotion. Acknowledge the Divine Presence in the moment. You literally say, "Welcome, fear." Or "Welcome, rage."

The Welcoming Prayer is primarily for feelings and emotions, not what triggered them. Establishing acceptance is difficult. There is nothing passive about it. Acceptance establishes us in reality; so we can respond to a situation effectively. For example, if you are terrified about a health issue, that fear may be immobilizing you. Accepting and then releasing the fear may free you to be able to deal with the issue.

Third – Let Go: You say, “Beloved, I give you my [fear/anger/hate/etc.] At this point you are turning the feeling over and you let it go.

I find this practice so valuable to myself personally, especially during the chaos of 2020. So many emotions.....

I also suggest this prayer to most directees in Spiritual Direction. It is usually met with apprehension, but once practiced it can be a godsend.

In conclusion, I would suggest:

1. **Know Yourself in order to Know Others**. Listen with an “undefended Heart” to our Self and the Self of “The Other”.
2. It has been said on thousands of bumper stickers, “Coexist”. I suggest **“Coalesce”!** Let us move towards growth together – uniting in the whole.
3. **We must move to “Action”**. Action in ourselves, in our families, friends, communities, our country, and our world. For without Action, we are stuck with the tranquilizer of contemplation and mindfulness, effecting no real change in the world. From the Hebrew Scriptures we hear in Micah 6:8, This is what is asked of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.

Namaste