

### Chapter 3: The 7-Step Integrative Healing Model

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The idea of treating the whole person is gaining momentum among healing professionals. Although specialists in these professions are still generally trained in one specialty only, there is a growing shift in the field to view healing as multidisciplinary and holistic, involving many aspects of the human experience. This chapter will describe the work on one organization, the Association of Trauma Outreach and Prevention (ATOP), Meaningfulworld, in its approach to healing trauma by applying a mind-body-eco-spirit method, through which various aspects of trauma, dispute, conflict, disagreement, or impact of disasters are assessed, identified, explored, processed, worked through, and released. This process transforms trauma and suffering by offering new meanings or new lessons learned.

Founded in 1990 and affiliated with the United Nations, ATOP Meaningfulworld has been committed to the service of humanity, creating healing, instilling peace, and transforming generational pain and suffering. The organization utilizes state-of-the-art scientific theory, as well as peace and consciousness research, to promote education and the development of technical skills of mental health professionals, teachers, psychologists, art therapists, nutritionists, alternative medicine practitioners, clergy, nurses, mediators, interfaith ministers, and lay persons working in communities affected by trauma. Meaningfulworld's Humanitarian Outreach Programs have worked in over 45 countries around the globe in seven regions: Africa, Asia, North and South Americas, Caribbean, Europe, The Middle East, transforming the lives of over a million people. For two-and-a-half decades, Meaningfulworld has been on a journey of healing that has focused intensely on how forgiveness and meaning impact levels of trauma and resilience. Much of this work has taken members of Meaningfulworld to spaces and places where healing has been the focus of professional and scientific work engaging many people in these countries.

Meaningfulworld's mission is to help develop a meaningful, peaceful, and just world where everyone can enjoy good health on mind-body-eco-spirit levels. Meaning, peace, and justice are nurtured through a process of learning, reflection, mindfulness, and transforming old habits through new and integrated experiences with a sense of responsibility. This is facilitated by healthy relationships that foster honest and open communication, insight into forgiveness, love and spiritual connection, non-violent communication, compassion, empathy, and active collaborations. The ultimate goal is to promote a global society guided by love, peace, passion, and meaning ([www.Meaningfulworld.com](http://www.Meaningfulworld.com)).

Monthly workshops in New York City, as well as humanitarian outreach programs abroad are some of the ways that Meaningfulworld accomplishes its goals. Workshops are offered to community members, professionals and para-professionals, and those interested in processing past traumas. Humanitarian outreach programs are carefully organized following a systematic approach in response to current traumatic events, such as a natural disaster or man-made events. For example, members of Meaningfulworld were on the ground in Puerto Rico only weeks after Hurricane Maria devastated the island in 2017. Other humanitarian missions were conducted after an earthquake in Haiti, a civil war in Burundi, and political unrest in the Middle East, to name a few. Working with individuals who have lived through such devastating events as hurricanes, earthquakes, and even war, requires a whole-person approach because it is necessary to address the mental, physical, and spiritual effects of such trauma on the individual, community, and the earth.

At the heart of Meaningfulworld's work around the world is the 7-step Integrative Healing Model through which traumatic experiences are assessed, identified, explored, described, released, processed, and eventually reintegrated. The model builds from the

integration of multiple theories including: psychodynamic (Freud, 1910), interpersonal (Sullivan, 1953), existential and humanistic (Frankl, 1962), electromagnetic field balancing (Dubro & Lapierre, 2002), forgiveness and reconciliation (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2010), learning theory, flower essences, essential oils, physical release (van der Kolk, 1993) and Soul-Surfing (Kalayjian, 2015), prayers, and meditation. The seven steps of the model include: 1) assessing levels of distress, disagreement, or conflict, 2) encouraging expression of feelings, 3) providing empathy and validation, 4) encouraging discovery and expression of meaning, 5) providing information, 6) instilling eco-centered healing, and 7) learning breathing, movement-centered healing, and meditation. This model provides the basis of all humanitarian outreach missions of Meaningfulworld (Kalayjian, 2002; Kalayjian & Sofletea, 2012). Next each step of the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model will be described, along with examples of how each step contributes to a holistic approach to healing.

At the core of the healing practices is Meaningfulworld' view is that recovery following trauma is achieved primarily through two psychological processes: meaning-making and forgiveness. The ability to find meaning in the traumatic event and cultivate a sense of purpose in one's life has been described as one of the central components to healing from disasters (Frankl, 1962; Kalayjian & Eugene, 2010a,b). Meaning-making has been linked to better adjustment following stressful life events (Collie & Long, 2005; Skaggs & Baron, 2006) and lower severity of post-traumatic symptoms (Kalayjian, Shigemoto, & Patel, 2010). Those who are able to process and make personal sense of often incomprehensible and atrocious events have been shown to experience healing following a trauma.

In Meaningfulworld's conceptualization of forgiveness, meaning in life, and trauma symptomology, the catalyst of the model is forgiveness (Frankl, 1962; Toussaint, Kalayjian, &

Diakonova-Curtis, 2017). Forgiveness provides the necessary cognitive, emotional, and spiritual space and resources, as well as, the appropriate shift to present and future perspectives, to bring about meaning in life and thereby reduce trauma symptoms both directly and indirectly in traumatized regions of the world (Frankl, 1962; Toussaint, Kalayjian, & Diakonova-Curtis, 2017). Research suggests that both forgiveness and meaning-making are effective ways to cope with trauma, and forgiveness can alleviate suffering by changing the past, not as a record of actual events that occurred, but through reappraising the meaning in the present (Roxberg, Burman, Guldbrand, Fridlund, & Barbosa da Silva 2010). Forgiveness of past events can facilitate meaning-making, create hope, change one's coping, develop resilience, and help co-create a healthy future. Both forgiveness and meaning-making yield improvements not only to mental well-being, but also physical health and spiritual connectedness.

The following section will provide a detailed account of how the 7-step Integrative Healing Model is applied during Meaningfulworld's healing workshops. One or two leaders follow the seven steps below while guiding the group through the steps.

### **The 7-Step Integrative Healing Model**

#### *Step 1. Assess Levels of Post-Traumatic Stress.*

The first step requires an assessment of the group and their level of distress following a devastating event. Participants are given the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) to determine severity of trauma; followed by questionnaires on forgiveness and meaning-making to indicate how these practices impact the levels of trauma. The HTQ assesses both perceptions of actual trauma events (including torture) and symptoms associated with trauma. The test has been translated into many different languages and the psychometric properties have been reliable across different cultures. There are 16 questions related to the participants' experience and

symptoms of trauma. Participants are asked to respond to questions such as “Do you feel depressed?” “Do you have nightmares?” and “Are you worried or nervous?” The participants respond to the statements on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not distressed at all by the symptoms) to 4 (extremely distressed) (Kleijn, Hovens, and Rodenburg, 2001). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire is used to measure the search for meaning and the presence of meaning in one’s life. The questionnaire consists of ten questions and the responses are based on a 7-point Likert scale (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler, 2006). Participants indicate the extent to how true the statement is for them, from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true). An example of a question related to the search for meaning in life is “I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life”. An example of a question related to the presence of meaning in life is “I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful”. Forgiveness is measured by the forgiveness subscale of the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religion and Spirituality, which contains single items for forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and feeling forgiven by God. The three questions include “I have forgiven myself for things that I have done wrong”, “I have forgiven those who hurt me”, and “I know that God forgives me” (Fetzer Institute and National Institute on Aging Working Group, 1999). All responses are collected anonymously and with informed consent. Questionnaires are used to collect data about a group for the purposes of understanding the current group dynamics and overall level of trauma, in order to tailor the healing workshops to the needs of that particular group and the individuals therein.

*Step 2. Encouraging the Expression of Feelings.*

The group leader then encourages one or multiple participants (one at a time) to express their feelings in the ‘here and now,’ as related to the disaster they have experienced. Release of feelings is therapeutic, as it helps release the grip that the trauma has on us, and let it go.

Participants are encouraged to follow the model IDEAL: Identifying the emotions, Describing the feelings connected to the event, rather than the event itself, Expressing the feelings, becoming familiar with naming the particular emotions, as well as identifying physical sensations related to the feelings, and finally, Letting go.

*Step 3. Providing Empathy and Validation.*

The workshop leader then encourages group members to provide validation to the person who shared in Step 2. Survivors' feelings can be validated by the members using statements such as "I can understand..." or "It makes sense to me..." and sharing information about how other survivors from around the world have coped. It is important to provide members with a sense of support and encouragement for meaning-making during a difficult time. Also used is intentional therapeutic touch, such as holding a survivor's hand. Here it is reinforced that the survivor's feelings of grief, fear, and frustration about the situation may turn into anger, if not processed. Group members are provided with an "Anger Wheel" of emotions in order to help members make connections between anger and other underlying emotions, such as sorrow, anxiety, or disappointment. We also encourage expression of positive feelings of joy of survival. When this model is practiced individually (not in a group setting), one is encouraged to find an empathic and non-judgmental person to share their trauma and accept empathy.

*Step 4. Encouraging the Discovery and Expression of Meaning.*

During this phase, group members who shared are asked "What lessons, meaning or positive associations did you discover as a result of this disaster?" This question is based on Viktor Frankl's logotherapeutic principle: that there could be a positive meaning discovered in the worst catastrophe. Group members are encouraged to share lessons learned and any meaningful connections achieved during the previous steps.

*Step 5. Providing and Gathering Information.*

Next, practical tools and information are given on how to overcome the effects of trauma, including the use of systematic desensitization process. The importance of preparation for natural disasters and mindfulness for human-made traumas is reinforced. Disaster preparedness is discussed and elaborated. Information regarding forgiveness and self-healing will be shared, including relevant books, articles, movies, and any useful materials. Group members are encouraged to share with each other tools and resources that have helped them in the past.

*Step 6. Utilizing Eco-Centered Processing.*

In the last two steps of the 7-Step Model, participants are encouraged to think beyond themselves in order to increase their sense of connectedness with humanity, the earth, and, if appropriate, a spiritual sense of the universe. Practical tools are shared to connect with Mother Earth. Discussions and exercises are conducted around environmental connections. Ways to care for one's environment are shared, starting with one's environment and expanding to the larger globe, being mindful of a system's perspective and how we can impact our environment, and how the environment in turn impacts us. Here, Mother Earth is presented as a way to heal oneself and others. Connecting with the sunrise and sunset, connecting with trees and flowers, and merging ourselves in the ocean or sea for cleansing our body and soul. Flower remedies, and flower essences are also used to minimize the negative impact of trauma, and help us regain our sense of self.

*Step 7. Finishing with Breath Work, Movement Exercises, and Meditation.*

Finally, breath is used as a natural medicine, and a healing tool. Since no one can control nature, others or what happens outside of one's self, survivors are assisted in controlling how they respond to the disaster. Survivors are provided instructions how to move and release fear,

uncertainty and resentments. In addition, survivors are instructed on how to use breath towards self-empowerment as well as to engender gratitude, compassion, faith, strength, and forgiveness in response to disasters. Breath work is combined with a series of physical movements, mindfully focusing on each energy center, its color vibration, its use and benefit, balancing and energizing each center with affirmations specifically designed for each center. This combination of movement, color identification, evaluation of the physical area, affirmation, and breath is called *Soul-Surfing*. The 7-Step Integrative Healing groups conclude with a Heart-to-Heart-Circle of Gratitude and Love, in which participants join hands in a circle and place their hands over the heart of the person to the right. This provides attendees with the opportunity to experience a sense of connectedness with each other, people across the globe, and all humanity.

Overall, the workshops provide participants with a whole-person approach to healing from traumatic events, as different aspects of the human experience, including emotions, physical sensations, meaning-making and lessons learned, as well as eco and spiritual interconnectedness are touched upon and reinforced. The outcome has been measurable and participants all over the globe have reported experiences of being empowered, healed, strengthened, at peace, and able to overcome their negative reactions to the trauma. They have also reported having embraced healthy coping patterns, which in turn have improved their ability to prepare for future adverse events by staying centered and empowered with new and positive lessons learned. Beginning with interpersonal healing, the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model addresses the transformation and collaboration so profoundly needed by our world that is going through violent transitions. Moreover, it demonstrates the interconnectedness of our interpersonal healing and development, conflict transformation, happiness and well-being, and inclusive and sustainable community building.

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