

II

Whole-Person Group Therapy Models

Chapter Three

The Seven-Step Integrative Healing Model

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MEANINGFULWORLD

The idea of treating the whole person is gaining momentum among healing professionals. Although these specialists are still generally trained in one area only, there is a growing shift in the field to viewing healing as multidisciplinary and holistic, involving many aspects of the human experience. This chapter describes the work of one organization, the Association of Trauma Outreach and Prevention (ATOP), termed *Meaningfulworld*. Its approach to healing trauma applies a mind-body-ecospirit method, through which various aspects of trauma or conflict, or the impact of disasters, are assessed, worked through, and released. This process transforms trauma and suffering by offering new meanings or new lessons.

Founded in 1990 and affiliated with the United Nations, ATOP Meaningfulworld has committed itself to the service of humanity by creating healing, instilling peace, and transforming generational pain and suffering. The organization uses state-of-the-art scientific theory, as well as peace and consciousness research, to promote the education and skill development of mental health professionals, teachers, arts therapists, alternative medicine practitioners, clergy, nurses, mediators, and laypersons working in communities affected by trauma. Meaningfulworld's Humanitarian Outreach Programs have been established in more than 45 countries throughout the world in seven regions—Africa, Asia, North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Middle East—transforming the lives of more than 1 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 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 mind–body–ecospirit health. Meaning is nurtured through a process of learning, reflection, and mindfulness that transforms old habits through new experiences with a sense of responsibility. This is facilitated by healthy relationships that foster honest and open communication, with love and spiritual connection, working toward an ultimate goal of a peaceful and meaningful global society (www.Meaningfulworld.com).

Monthly workshops in New York City, in addition to humanitarian outreach programs abroad, are some of the ways Meaningfulworld accomplishes its goals. Workshops are offered to community members, professionals, and paraprofessionals. Humanitarian outreach programs are carefully organized according to a systematic approach in response to such current traumatic events as a natural disaster or human-made crises. 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 following an earthquake in Haiti, a civil war in Burundi, and political unrest in the Middle East. Working with individuals who have lived through devastating events like 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, the community, and the Earth.

At the heart of Meaningfulworld's work is the seven-step Integrative Healing Model, through which traumatic experiences are assessed, explored, released, and eventually reintegrated. The model builds upon the integration of multiple theories, including the following: psychodynamic (Freud, 1910); interpersonal (Sullivan, 1953); existential and humanistic (Frankl, 1962); forgiveness and reconciliation (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2010); learning theory, flower essences, essential oils, and physical release (Van der Kolk & Saporta, 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 the 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 for the humanitarian outreach missions of Meaningfulworld (Kalayjian, 2002; Kalayjian & Sofletea, 2012).

At the core of the healing practices is Meaningfulworld's view 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 life has been described as one of the central components of healing from disasters (Frankl, 1962; Kalayjian & Eugene, 2010a, 2010b). Meaning-making has been linked to better adjustment following stressful life events (Collie & Long, 2005; Skaggs & Baron, 2006) and lower severity of posttraumatic symptoms (Kalayjian, Shigemoto, & Patel, 2010).

The catalyst of Meaningfulworld's 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 reduce trauma symptoms (Frankl, 1962; Toussaint, Kalayjian, & Diakonova-Curtis, 2017). Forgiveness can alleviate suffering by changing the past, not as a record of actual events that occurred, but through reappraising its meaning in the present (Roxberg et al., 2010) and cocreating a healthy future. Both forgiveness and meaning-making improve not only mental well-being, but also physical health and spiritual connectedness.

The following section provides a detailed account of how the seven-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 INTEGRATIVE HEALING MODEL

Step 1: Assessing Levels of Posttraumatic Stress

The first step requires an assessment of the group and its 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 assess how these practices have impacted the levels of trauma. The HTQ, which assesses both perceptions of actual trauma events (including torture) and symptoms associated with trauma, has been translated into many different languages. Its psychometric properties have been deemed reliable across different cultures. There are 16 questions related to the participants' experiences and symptoms of trauma, for example, "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, & Rodenburg, 2001).

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire, which is used to measure the search for meaning and the presence of meaning in one's life, consists of 10 questions, with the responses based on a seven-point Likert scale (Steger et al., 2006). Participants indicate 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,” while 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 related to forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and feeling forgiven by God. The three items are as follows: “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). Responses are collected anonymously and with informed consent. The questionnaires are used to collect data about a group for the purposes of understanding the current group dynamics and overall level of trauma to tailor the healing workshops to the needs of that particular group and its members.

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 lessen the grip the trauma has on us, enabling us to let it go. Participants are encouraged to follow the model known as 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 such statements as “I can understand . . .” or “It makes sense to me . . .,” and sharing information about how other survivors from throughout 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*, for instance, 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 to help them make connections between anger and other underlying emotions, for example, 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), people are encouraged to find an empathic and

nonjudgmental person with whom to share their trauma and from whom to accept empathy.

Step 4: Encouraging the Discovery and Expression of Meaning

During this phase, group members who have 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 a positive meaning can be discovered in the worst catastrophe. Group members are encouraged to share lessons learned and any meaningful connections achieved during the previous steps. Focusing on positive outcomes, personal strengths, and new possibilities is known to increase posttraumatic growth and resilience by decreasing such negative emotional responses as hopelessness, anger, and distress, according to research cited by the American Psychological Association (Collier, 2016).

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 a systematic desensitization process. The importance of preparation for natural disasters and mindfulness regarding human-made traumas is reinforced. Disaster preparedness is discussed and elaborated. Information regarding forgiveness and self-healing is shared, including relevant books, articles, movies, and any useful materials. Group members are encouraged to share with one another tools and resources that have helped them in the past.

Step 6: Using Eco-Centered Processing

In the last two steps of the Integrative Healing Model, participants are encouraged to think beyond themselves 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 personal surroundings and expanding to the larger globe, learning about how we can impact our environment and how the environment, in turn, impacts us. Here, awareness of Mother Earth is presented as a way to heal oneself and others. Connecting with the sunrise and sunset, identifying with trees and flowers, and merging ourselves in the ocean or sea can cleanse both our bodies and our souls.

Step 7: Finishing with Breath Work, Movement Exercises, and Meditation

Finally, breath is used as a natural medicine and a healing tool. Since trauma can confront individuals with a loss of control, survivors are assisted in discovering ways of controlling their own responses. They learn how to use breath for self-empowerment, moving thereby to release fear, uncertainty, and resentments. In addition, they use exercises to practice gratitude, compassion, and forgiveness in response to disasters. Breath work is combined with a series of physical movements that mindfully focus on each energy center, its color vibration, its use, and its benefit, balancing and energizing each center with affirmations specifically designed for it. This combination of movement, color identification, evaluation of the physical area, affirmation, and breath is called *soul-surfing*. The 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 joined hands over the heart of the person to the right. This provides attendees with the opportunity to experience a sense of connectedness with one another, people throughout the world, 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, and eco and spiritual interconnectedness are touched upon and reinforced. These techniques particularly address the whole person by allowing participants a safe space wherein to focus on various aspects of their individual posttraumatic experiences. Participants are taught how to pay attention to not only their thoughts and emotions, but also their body sensations, breathing, and relationships with others, as well as look beyond themselves to the earth and to the universe. The outcome is measurable, as participants have reported experiences of being empowered, healed, strengthened, at peace, and able to overcome their negative reactions to the trauma (Toussaint et al., 2017). 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 on the basis of new and positive lessons learned.

Beginning with interpersonal healing, the Integrative Healing Model addresses the transformation and collaboration so profoundly needed by our world as it continues to move 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. Each of the seven steps follows evidence-based theories, for example, encouraging the expression of feelings (Freud, 1910), providing empathy and validation (Sullivan, 1953), encouraging dis-

covery and expression of meaning (Frankl, 1962), facilitating forgiveness and reconciliation (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2010), instilling eco-centered healing, and demonstrating breathing as a form of movement-centered release (Van der Kolk, 1987).

Any adult with a desire to offer healing in a postdisaster area can be trained to become a workshop facilitator. ATOP Meaningfulworld offers such a certification program consisting of eight daylong training events in New York City, concluding with a graduation ceremony at the United Nations. More information about the training program can be found at <http://meaningfulworld.com/our-work/workshops>.

Meaningfulworld has worked in more than 45 countries and more than 25 states in the United States, paying close attention to the cultural needs of each country or state. The workshop materials have been translated into several languages, including Spanish, Armenian, and French Creole, and it has employed translators and cultural insiders to give participants the chance to express their thoughts and emotions in their native language. Furthermore, due to the organization's commitment to social justice and partnership with the United Nations, workshops have been conducted to illuminate gender-based variables that contribute to horizontal manifestation of trauma, for instance, domestic violence. Finally, to ensure that this work is sustainable and lasting, Meaningfulworld outreach teams continue communication with the collaborations and connections made during trips and workshops. Post-workshop follow-up with facilitators and, in some cases, the participants is an essential step in ensuring that the changes are lasting. Meaningfulworld teams have also organized follow-up trips to such countries as Puerto Rico, Haiti, and Armenia to reevaluate and reassess the needs of the community following the original program. Data are collected at follow-up and, when appropriate, compared with the original data. Generally, a decline in post-traumatic symptoms and an increase in meaning-making and forgiveness are observed throughout time.

CONCLUSION

Complex trauma that addresses multicultural and multigenerational issues needs a whole-person approach. Meaningfulworld builds on an integration of established and alternative methods to address the bio-social-spiritual and ecological needs of traumatized people throughout the world.

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