Flowers grow out of dark moments - Corita Kent

What are Traumatic Life Events?

- Single exposure or repeated exposure to events involving actual or threatened death, serious injury, sexual or other physical assault and a personal response of intense fear, helplessness or horror.
Context for Trauma Exposure

- **Families** e.g. motor vehicle and other accidents, criminal assault, personal disasters, child abuse, domestic violence, rape, sadistic organised torture and entrapment, internment and captivity
- **Communities** e.g. natural or person created disasters, repeated physical and emotional deprivation and abuse, criminal assault, rape
- **Societies** e.g. war, political torture and trauma, internment and captivity, rape
- **Occupations** e.g. soldiers, nurses, police, fire fighters, ambulance service, medical practitioners, prisoner officers, bank tellers

What is traumatisation?

- Traumatisation is about disintegration and disconnection
- Dissociation of:
  - Body
  - Awareness
  - Sensation
  - Knowledge
Consequences of Trauma

- Body
- Thinking
- Self
- Emotion
- Relationships
- Behaviour

The Impact on the Body

- hypervigilance, anxiety, sleep problems
- intense startle reactions, headaches, gastrointestinal & respiratory disturbances, chronic pain, cardiovascular & neuromuscular problems
- urinary tract difficulties, skin disorders
- long term effects on the neuro-chemical response to stressors,
- alterations in immune competency,
- decreased hippocampal volume
- extreme responses to reminders of traumatic events, startle response
- memory disturbance, traumatic memories stimulated by arousal, body rather than narrative memories
The Impact on Thinking Processes

- dissociation
- avoidance and minimisation of traumatic events
- disorientation in place and time
- memory dysfunction, concentration decision-making problems
- selective attention to threat-related cues
- learning difficulties
- cognitive distortions

The Impact on the Sense of Self

- annihilation of the meaning structure
- lack of a sense of individual autonomy
- understanding self as evil contaminated or tainted
- lack of an internal sense of worth
- perception of current reality as unsafe
- waiting for catastrophic consequences
- lack of a sense of personal power to influence the outcome of events
- perception of current reality as unchangeable
The Impact on Emotions

- chronic depression and despair contrasting with and outbursts of rage
- feelings of emptiness and numbness, hopelessness, powerlessness, rage, fear, shame, guilt
- inability to connect feelings, bodily sensations and thoughts
- difficulty in regulating overwhelming feelings
- intense self-hatred
- extreme fear of making mistakes and evaluation

The Impact on Relationships

- lack of a sense of a separate personal identity
- traumatic bonding with perpetrators
- social withdrawal and constriction
- patterns of re-victimisation and re-enactment
- difficulty in intimate relationships
- pattern of abusive behaviour towards others
- fear of intimacy yet intolerance for being alone
The Impact on Behaviour

- constriction in initiative, future planning and active engagement in the world
- chronic suicidal behaviour, self-injury & sabotage
- impulsive behaviours, substance abuse
- overwork, overachievement, perfectionism
- patterns of re-victimisation and excessive risk-taking
- substance abuse and eating disorders

What is Yoga?

- Yoga means union or connection
- Ancient principles and philosophies
- Effective in the here and now
- Yoga is non-competitive
- Unique for each person
- Not a religion
How can Yoga help?

- Hope when all is despair
- Integration & connection
- Self-mastery & agency
- Acceptance & focus on life gifts, gratitude and letting go
- Trust in learning & meaning
- Bridge the disconnected mind, body & spirit

Eight limbs of Yoga
Yoga Practices

Performed Practices

- Postures (asanas)
- Cleansing practices (shatkarmas)
- Breath practices (pranayamas)
- Sound vibrations (mantras)
- Deep relaxation (pratyhara)
- Concentration techniques (dharana)
- Meditation (dhyana)
- Gestures & muscles locks (mudras & bandhas)
Lifestyle Practices

- General yoga
- Ethics & personal codes (Yamas & Niyamas)
- Meditation in action (Karma yoga)
- Devotion & service (Bhakti yoga)
- Expanding awareness & wisdom (Jnana yoga)

Stillness & Constancy

- Inner self-referencing
Life is like a hurricane

- Potential Chaos & Fragmentation

Inner calm
Surfing

- Move out of victim
- Active and anchored observer
- Strategic intervention
- Respond rather than react

Live in the Now
Meditation

- Anywhere, anytime…
Benefits

- Health
- Strength & postural alignment
- Greater vitality
- Authentic power & agency
- Live in the present
- Calmness
- Concentration & focus
- Flexibility, co-ordination & balance
- Self-awareness and reliance
- Accessible to everyone
- Prevention, intervention & evolution

Yoga & the Prevention of Traumatisation

- Self-responsibility & yet deep compassion for physical, emotional and spiritual well-being
- The Yama & Niyamas can help provide ethical guiding principles
- Becoming a discerning witness & able to self-soothe
- Early & effective management in bodily reactions, thinking, feeling, behaviour and relating to self and other people
- Enabling solid & grounded foundation (mind, body & spirit) that comes back to a place of being flexible, responsive, compassionate, boundaried and loving no matter what happens
- Encouraging service from abundance in ever-widening circles of influence
Yoga and the Treatment of Traumatised People

- Challenges the trauma paradigm of helplessness, terror and horror
- Enables choice & movement from reaction to response
- Tools for the active observer and discerning intervener in all areas of functioning
- Connection of mind, body & spirit
- Continuity between past, present and future—a meaningful narrative!

Evolution after Traumatisation

- Facing and integrating one’s own complete vulnerability in a timely way can facilitate:
- Creation of new neural pathways and networks
- Increased and sometimes quite exquisite cognitive complexity
- Marked response flexibility
- Moving beyond pre-occupation with everyday concerns while remaining fully present.
- Inspiration and the promotion of life as very precious, indeed!
What are the processes that facilitate such outcomes?

- Gentle and soothing calmness?
- Active observation? (mindfulness, separating self from external events)
- Strategic and often passionate agency? (spirit, body, thoughts, feelings, behaviour, relating)
- Discerning humility?

The Experience Cycle

- Anticipation
- Investment and Encounter
- Confirmation and disconfirmation
- Constructive revision
- Evolution
  - Peter’s story
Effective Teachers (1)

- No attachment to self-gloration
- Have good referral networks
- Respect the person’s efforts, acknowledge their courage, recognise their simultaneous strength and fragility and empathise with the difficulty of their struggle
- Capacity to experience, accept and understand an individual’s reality
- Being ethical, collaborative, gentle and provide clear and consistent support.
- Respect of emotional and physical boundaries
- Facilitate a coherent sense of continuity between the past, present and the future of the traumatised person
- Model psychological resilience, health and well-being and simultaneously acknowledge humanness and vulnerability
- Respect the social, interpersonal, gender-related, ethnic, racial, cultural, spiritual and biological context of the individual

Effective Teachers (2)

- Create a space of psychological integrity where the needs of the client’s are central and the needs and rights of the helper are respected and looked after by the helper
- The individual is empowered to view themselves as the primary agent of choice and action in their life.
- Entering the reality of the traumatised person combines genuine empathy with suggestions for making meaning of, and recovering from, these traumatising events and their consequences
- Reflective, enact sound interpersonal skills, welcome ambiguity and complexity, demonstrate psychological integration, health and a capacity for ongoing professional and personal development.
- Ability to tolerate and make meaning of the powerful feelings experienced by themselves and their clients is seen as fundamental to the quality of the traumatised person’s recovery
Relevant Research

Yoga for Depression

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