The Role of Human Healing in Promoting Environmental and Social Justice

Elaine Walters
Trauma Healing Project
www.healingattention.org
October 8, 2019

Introductions - Pairs

• Equal time - timed
• Confidential – nothing said is shared with anyone else, or brought up again to your partner
• Listen with respect, confidence in the person being listened to, interest, positive regard – shown via body language, voice tone and facial expressions
• Listen without (internal or external) judgement, opinion, agenda, worry or ‘relating‘ – there is nothing to fix and listening is more than sufficient
Introductions - Pairs

With your partner’s kind attention, consider sharing:

- Your name

- A story from your early life about a special connection you had with a tree or trees....
How We Get Hurt

- **Accident**: things happen
- **Abuse**: intentional / patterned
- **Handed Down**: impacted by others’ hurts
- **Oppression**: institutional, systematic mistreatment of one group by another

The Fundamental Injury is Disconnection

- We feel alone
- We are more likely to harm or tolerate harm
- We can’t think...

Trauma and Learning Policy Institute, www.massadvocates.org
Unhealed hurts stay with us....

**Brain Stem**
- Coordinates basic body functions (heart beat, swallowing, etc.)
- Routes sensory information to other parts of the brain

**Limbic System**
- Involved in emotions, memory, and motivation
- Coordinates flow of information between brain stem and cortex

**Cortex**
- Involved in higher-order thinking processes such as problem-solving, perspective-taking, and cognitive reappraisals

Under stress, many of us have challenges with:

**Behavior**
- At times, may look impulsive, avoidant, aggressive, or fearful

**Relationships**
- May have difficulty establishing trust, making needs known, accepting or integrating feedback

**Attention, Memory, and Learning**
- Brain systems related to sustaining focus, maintaining working memory, and forming long-term memories may be disrupted
Survival Response Can Become Patterned and Rigid (For Individuals & Communities)

- Denial or lack of memory
- Avoidance
- Altered belief systems
- Addiction/compulsion
- Depression/numbness
- Violence/aggression
- Risk taking
- Self-Abuse

Coping and Healing

- Self-Control
- Behavior Management
- Suppression of Feelings
- Suppression of “Symptoms”
- Avoidance of Triggers
- Desensitization
- Denial & Disconnection
- Expression with attention
- Emotive Processing/Release
- Physical Release
- Re-membering
- Spiritual Healing
- Intentional Realignment
- Reconnection & Engagement
Challenging Discouragement

• Why it Matters
• How We Got This Way
  – Direct hurts & conditioning
  – No help to recover earlier in our lives

... most feelings of discouragement come from earlier times....

Pairs x 2

Pair 1: How would things be different for you personally if all human beings, trees and the natural world were fully respected and cared for?

Pair 2: How would things be different in our world if all human beings, trees and the natural world were fully respected and cared for?
I do not allow myself to be overcome by hopelessness, no matter how tough the situation. I believe that if you just do your little bit without thinking of the bigness of what you stand against, if you turn to the enlargement of your own capacities, just that itself creates new potential.

— Vandana Shiva —

Our capacity to stay connected and present and to keep thinking is critical to our fight for social and environmental justice

These require healing...
We need each other...

Our Role - Enlightened Witness

• Partner versus Expert
• Getting Comfortable With Pain
  – Requires Self-Reflection & Healing
  – Takes Practice
• New/Different Focus & Skills
  – Attending to Power/Situational Dynamics
  – Deep Listening
  – Focusing on Early Hurts
  – Staying Close
Thank you!
For being here today and for taking care of yourselves, our trees and forests, and each other.

Elaine Walters
The Trauma Healing Project
www.healingattention.org
ewalters@healingattention.org

Tree sitting is a last resort. When you see someone sitting in a tree trying to protect it, you know that every level of our society has failed.

- Julia Butterfly Hill -
The question is not 'Can you make a difference?' You already do make a difference. It's just a matter of what kind of difference you want to make during your life on this planet.

— Julia Hill —

Continuum of Presence

- Present
  - Oriented & Grounded
  - Emotionally Regulated
  - Values = Behaviors
  - Flexible/Responsive Thinking
  - Have Perspective/Empathy

- Distracted
  - Disoriented & Ungrounded
  - Dysregulated
  - Vulnerability to Reenactment & Reactivity
  - Rigid Thinking
  - Self Focused

- Dissociated
Continuum of Presence

Present  Distracted  Dissociated