

# Association for a Healing Education

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## The Nature and Treatment of Trauma

by Dr. Andrea Rentea

### I. THE NATURE OF TRAUMA

The word trauma comes from the Greek word wound. As such, it reveals its nature immediately as a foreign intrusion into our body that disrupts our regular life flow. Interestingly whether it is physical or psychological, a traumatic event always has the quality of not being able to be assimilated or digested by the injured person. In a physical trauma it is easy to see that the tissues are separated as for example in a cut, a fracture of a bone etc. While in a psychological injury, the disconnect between the various parts of the soul may be even more intense but it is more difficult to visualize. In a physical injury, we have various types of cells rushing to the area to “fend off” more invaders from the outside (white blood cells come in to stop bacteria from entering deeper into the layers of the body through this unexpected opening). Other cells, rush in to close the wound so that the layers become continuous again. When the wound is psychological, reserves of our soul life have to do the same thing as the white blood cells- they have to prevent this event from becoming an isolated island in the emotional makeup of the child or adult. Strengths from the ego have to be summoned to help put the event in context and reintegrate it into the understanding that the person has of the totality of events around them. When this does not happen we then get the so

called post traumatic stress syndrome. The main characteristics of that state are: Firstly repetition – meaning that the event seems to play itself again and again in the persons mind (and this resembles of course a festering wound that gets treated and seemingly closes only to reopen again with more pus formation). Secondly, the person has an increased sense of excitability so that seemingly innocuous sensory inputs from the outside become in themselves painful to bear and lead to more trauma. Thirdly, the person seeks avoidance, like a limb that has been injured and is not being “favored”, the person or child withdraws from more and more of the environment. Traumatic events can show their nature sometimes only years later. It was only about 5 years after the original destruction of the federal building in Oklahoma City that the helpers of first response began to show psychological consequences of their exposure to the traumatizing human suffering that they had witnessed. Authorities expect the first behavioral impact of the 9-11 trauma to show itself only in a year or two from now.

One of the fundamental problems which we are facing today is that, in a strange twist, traumatic events, especially in children, are becoming more serious, longer lasting, and manifold; while at the same time the ability of the same children to handle these events is being diminished. The reason for this is, to just

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give one example, that the same parent who might be verbally abusive to the child and do this severely and repetitively is at the same time the parent who will not, obviously, provide the psychological warmth, the natural clothing, the “pictorial material,” the Waldorf –schooling, the trips into nature, that by definition, would strengthen the child in its relationship to the outer world and thus strengthen its defenses. The irony is that this child in turn will become potentially an abusive adult heaping upon his or her children more of the same and perpetuating this vicious cycle.

## II. THE ANATOMY OF TRAUMA

Anthroposophy gives us valuable insights into structuring some of the understanding of traumatic events. Essentially, the four elements that are around us provide a guide to the direction from which the organism can be attacked. Rudolf Steiner connects the soul life with the four major organs of the body liver, lung, heart and kidney. These organs do not only have a physical function but rather also an influence on the soul life. The lung has to do with thinking, and an abnormal lung function can result in stiff, repetitive thoughts- it is associated with the earth element. The liver is associated with the water element and its abnormal manifestation maybe one of excessive withdrawal into dreamy fantasies or conversely the inability to “be grounded”. The kidney is related to the air element, wind, and it is the basis of fear, agitation, anger, etc. The heart rules the fire element, and it is related to abnormal movement, hyperactivity, etc. The specific quality of a trauma is in fact even in common use of language such as

“It was like a weight on my chest.” “I felt like I was drowning.” “The wind got knocked out of me.” or “I got burned on that one.” The specific nature of the traumatic event will result in an injury to its corresponding organ such that, for example, an abusive loud voice will be more likely to create anger while being involved in a flood damage is likely to make the victim more depressed and unable to take any further action.

## III. HOW CAN WE ASSIST THE SOUL AND SPIRIT AFTER A SHOCK?

If we look carefully at children that have been traumatized we may be able to help them by giving them healing clay modeling when there was a lung trauma, drawing or painting with a liver trauma, singing with a kidney trauma, and eurythmy or gymnastics with a heart trauma.

Strengthening our inner rhythms is also very helpful because a fundamental indication of Rudolf Steiner’s clearly illuminates the fact that the will can only be strengthened through rhythms and through a strengthened rhythm we may be able to overcome the effects of a traumatic event. We can strengthen the rhythms through establishing routines throughout the day or the days of the week. Eurythmy, poetry, healing therapeutic music, songs, and dance can also help in working on these inner rhythms.

## IV. IMPORTANT SUBSTANCES FOR TREATING TRAUMA

The substances that help alleviate the effects of trauma are extremely important for our times when so many people suffer from shock, trauma and the pervasive culture of fear that has penetrated our age.

A well-known herb is Arnica Montana. It is primarily used to treat bruises, strains, and aches. It is also used in travel remedies and some remedies for soul shock. Arnica can be found in ointments, baths, oils and drops for internal use. Arnica has a warming effect on the ego which is weakened in trauma. Dr. Steiner has described the role of arnica as “calling the higher self to support the astral body. “. Arnica calls the astral body from the inside to come and support the ego.

Another excellent remedy is Oxalis, also known as the Halleluia plant. (It’s leaf is shaped like a large clover. ) Dr Steiner had said that “if you have an illness of the digestive tract - the stomach and intestines -as a result of psychic shocks and persistent grief then you can prescribe Oxalic”. You can use the ointments that contain Oxalic, make compresses or take it internally. Dr Steiner said that it will “energize the etheric system.”

Silver, also known as Argentum, is used as a treatment for many cases of trauma. In the medical recordings of Dr. Steiner there is a case of a patient who, as a result of shock, suffered from” ringing in the head and a fear feeling in the abdominal region.” Silver was prescribed because in this situation, “ when there is a deformation of higher members, silver has the property of chasing away the astral and ego bodies from a too deep penetration of the metabolic limb. It gives the ego and astral body strength.” Silver can be combined with other elements to achieve the necessary results. It is prescribed in different forms such as creams, drops and ointments.

Antimony is another remedy which has an effect on harmonizing the relationship between the physical body, the life forces, the soul and the higher self. In its natural state this mineral consists of many slender radiating arms, closely packed together. As a medicine, it is very receptive to the form of the life body and the physical body. It contains form giving forces which strengthen the astral body but in relationship to the etheric or life forces. It is often prescribed for both bodily and soul fatigue.

Becoming familiar with the common effects of both incidental injuries and pervasive fear and trauma is very necessary in our times in order to provide for the children in our care. However, we will never be able to completely protect them from these impacts and in fact we should not. Educating the children for the future also means teaching them how to create a fulfilling life that might also present everything from mild disappointments to accidents and injuries. There will be wounds to heal. Fortunately we also have the possibilities to connect them to their spiritual origins, without sentimentality, which gives us all the courage to meet what comes toward us.

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