



Wounds and Gifts Finding the Story that is Trying to Live Through Us



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Summary

- **Trauma** can be something that initiates us to a deeper experience of Self, connection to others, and life's purpose.
- **Focusing** offers us a therapeutic and contemplative practice for both self-healing and working with others.
- **The development of the Self** of the therapist is an essential component in working with trauma.
- **Unique gifts** are discovered and inform the healing journey of the therapist and client alike.



Working with Trauma

Finding the thread through wounds and gifts

What is trauma?

Trauma is an experience or experiences that overwhelm the organism.



What Happens?

**Cascade of
Protective
Responses**

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**Self-
concept
impacted**

What Happens?

**Cascade of
Protective
Responses**

**Self-
concept
impacted**

**Partial
Selves**

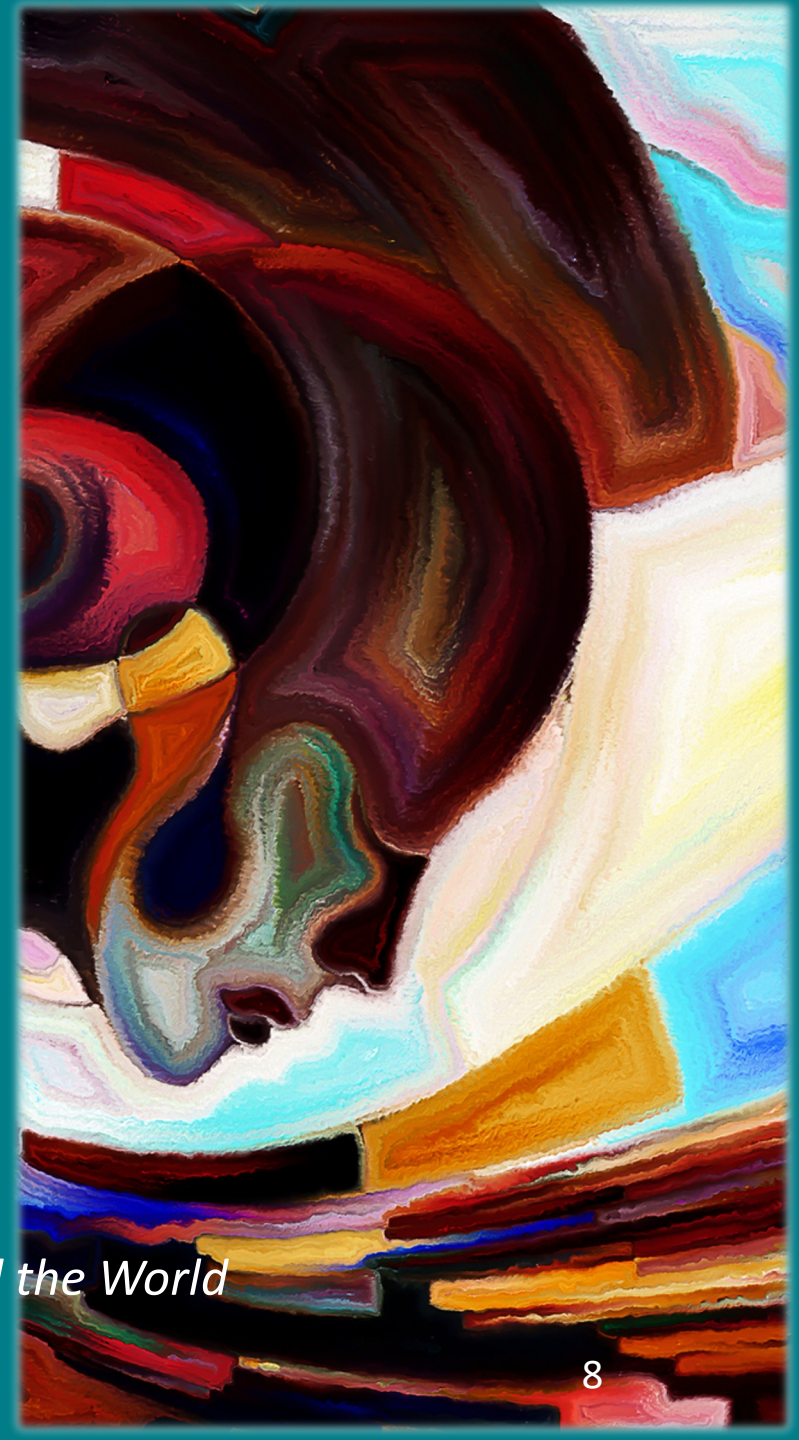


A Divided Self

"Some wounds cut so deeply that they sever the mind from the heart and cleave the soul in two. Some trauma leaves people so split within that they can only see the world as utterly divided."

Before it came to mean a holy war waged by true believers upon unbelievers, 'jihad' referred to the battle being fought inside the human heart and soul."

- Michael Meade, The World Behind the World



How We Respond

A Doorway



How We Respond

A Doorway



Finding the *One in There*



How We Respond

A Doorway



Finding the *One in There*



Being Present



How We Respond

A Doorway



Finding the *One in There*



Being Present



Experiencing Freshly





We all have a trauma story.

*“Your life is not a problem to be solved but a gift to be opened.”
- Wayne Muller*

My Story

I wrote an article for the Folio entitled, *Hidden Trauma: A Personal Story of Living with Dyslexia*. It was difficult to write a story about my own wound because when we enter our wound all the shakiness, fear, self-criticism and doubt return.



My Daughter's Story

My daughter had always been a very confident child and engaged student. When reading became the center of learning in first grade, she changed. Unable to keep up and perform with the rest of the students, she became anxious and developed stomach aches.



Dyslexia

Imagine everyone around you being able to do something important, and you cannot. In fact, the harder you try, the more frustrated you become and the further behind you fall.



You can't see what others are doing to be successful, nor is your teacher able to explain anything to you other than to encourage you to "keep up" or practice more of the activity that you are unable to do in the first place.

Your Story



“Until we have a sense of the story trying to live through us we miss the meaning hiding in the wounds we carry.”

- Michael Meade



Post-Traumatic Growth

Healing Wounds and Opening Gifts

The gifts in my Story



- Sitting with Darkness
- Persistence
- Enlightening Connections

Shame



**Our shame
is a placeholder for our trauma. Go there and you
will find the wound and your gifts. It is not an
easy journey!**

We Have Focusing!

Our wounds and gifts come threaded together. No wonder it is so difficult for people to follow the thread and unwind trauma and embrace gifts.

Focusing allows us to be with whatever comes and appreciate the trouble it brings.

... is a powerful practice of following the threads of our wounds and gifts so we can remain vulnerable to who we are becoming and to those around us.





Exercise #1

Following the Thread

Exercises for Discovering Our Gifts



Finding Presence

Presence is...

The natural state of the self: calm, curious, interested, and able to act in mature and balanced ways.

Our ability to be a compassionate observer of our experience. As one client remarked, “I have feelings, but I am not my feelings”

The experience of being larger than one’s problems and emotions, able to explore with curiosity the experience that is there. - *A.W. Cornell*



Finding Presence through the Physical Body

- Let's take some time to pause and notice our body on the chair. Feel your hands and feet, your seat and the weight of your body.
- Bring your awareness to your breathing.
- This is our physical body, our embodiment and experience of "I am here."

Finding Presence in our Feeling Body

Allow an in-breath to draw your awareness inside your body, sensing how it feels to be you from the inside.

Our awareness from the inside is what I call our feeling body or situational body. It is our awareness of how we carry our experience bodily. It is a reflection on “how am I?”

We might also call this our guest house where we can welcome and safely be-with our experience.

Finding your Safe Place

I invite each of you to think of a place that feels calm, beautiful, and safe to you. This may be a place you know well, or you imagine. The important quality is that it is a place that represents safety, calm and beauty and that you can visit anytime you like. In fact you can be there for the rest of this exercise if you like.

Imagine your safe place in all its beauty and calmness inside you.

Sense this place in all its richness, colors, smells, and textures.

Notice how your body feels in this place. Take a moment to feel your strong energy and the peace it brings.

The First Door



1

Entering the Wound

- Take some time to recall an event, circumstance or chronic situation that was wounding, caused suffering, and made a difference in your life.
- There may be several situations and that's just fine. There may be a number of memories around a theme.
- Allow yourself to feel what wants your awareness right now and feels manageable at this time.

Sensing into your Wound

1



- Allow a feel of the **whole experience** to form while you stay calm, grounded and present.
- Allow yourself to sense into what **got held up or blocked** in your life as a result of this experience. What stopped, was no longer possible or changed?
- Allow yourself to get a **felt sense of the wound**, hurt or pain felt at that time.
- Inwardly ask this wounded place to say or **show you something** about how it suffered. Perhaps there was a loss of opportunity, confidence, or identity

Sensing into you Wound

1



- Take your time to sense its emotional qualities and point of view. It's like you're pulling up a chair and listening to your body's knowing of how your wounding experience affected you.
- You might invite yourself to sense into what you came to believe about yourself as a result of this wounding experience.
- Invite your whole body to let you know how it has carried this experience over time ... how did you survive carrying this for this so long?

A Gift Is...

A strength or talent that can come into being when we are faced with a very difficult life experience or wound.

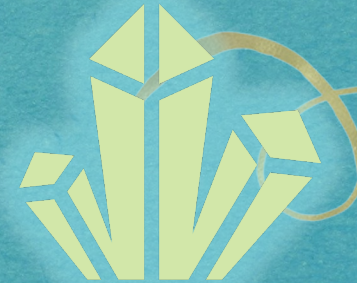
It can be felt as a healing force and antidote to the shame and self criticism that developed out of our suffering.





“ *In many cases, this gift is what we wish we could have gotten from others – or been able to give to ourselves – during this difficult time.*”

- Bruce Anderson



Acknowledging Strengths and Gifts

Let's take some time to bring our awareness back to our felt sense of how we have lived through this wounding experience. What helped you survive?

Sense for the energy that pulled you through the wounding time or experience.

See if it feels right to be with your strong energy. Allow your inner strength to be known and felt.

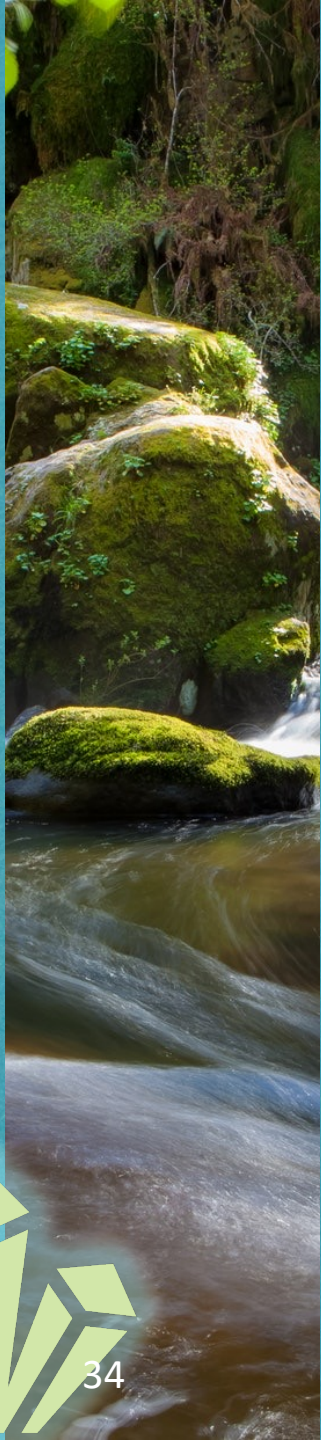


Acknowledging Strengths and Gifts

Perhaps you can sense the way it has a deeper connection to the unique person that is you. Does it in some way feel essential to who you are now? Does it play a role in what you do for a vocation?

Notice if what we have called a strength could also be felt as a gift, something that you do or give yourself that is healing and life giving.

If it feels right, maybe you could invite this inner quality to let you know how it might want to be expressed more fully in the world.





Writing prompt

Write a few words about your wound

- What happened?
- How did it make you feel about yourself?
- How did it shape your self concept?

Then reflect on what got you through it.

- How did you do that?
- What did you learn?
- What grew as a strength or emerged as talent or gift? (what has it helped you do?)

My wound is: _____ (what happened). It left me feeling or believing I was _____. What got me through that experience or time in life was my being able to _____ (strength or gift).

♥ Let's pause.



A wide-angle landscape photograph of a black sand beach. In the foreground, the dark, volcanic sand is textured with small mounds of dried seaweed. The middle ground shows a calm sea reflecting the overcast sky. In the background, a range of jagged, snow-dusted mountains rises against a heavy, grey sky. A vibrant rainbow arches across the upper portion of the frame, its colors appearing slightly muted due to the atmospheric conditions. The word "Break" is centered in the upper half of the image in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

Break



Exercise #2

The Second Door



2

An Experience of Deep Aliveness

Sometimes we are deeply touched by the beauty of the world. We have experiences that shake our soul and leave us with a deep sense of connectedness, wonderment and appreciation for who we are. Something bigger opens and reveals our giftedness and infuses meaning into our life story.

The life energy that comes with our gift can be re-wounding. It can feel like the energy of a wound or trauma. No wonder following your bliss is so hard.



Follow your Bliss

“We’ve been educated to lead a so-called practical and useful life. To receive our gift, however, implies that there may be a completely different life to be lived than the one we have settled for.”

- Michael Jones

A Theory of Trouble

Finding a gift can be an overwhelming experience if we are not prepared to grow bigger and accept its call.



Finding Ourselves

“We 'find ourselves' when we are in trouble because it draws on all our resources, making us more resourceful and more aware of capacities we didn't know were there.”

- Michael Meade



Finding a Moment of Deep Aliveness

2



Allow yourself to search for an experience in which you felt alive, vibrant, and deeply connected to yourself and perhaps others.

Let's go slowly and drift through our memory. We may have many such memories, or it may feel a blank today. Take your time.

It does not matter if what you find seems like a small moment or a big event. What is important is that life touched you in a deep, fresh, and perhaps unexpected way.

Allow your aliveness to be present and bodily felt.

Invite the wholeness of the experience to be in the present. Speak out loud beginning sentences with I'm sensing, noticing, aware of and so forth. Let the experience be occurring now.



Finding a Moment of Deep Aliveness

Sense your body's energy and the way it feels to be you experiencing this moment.

Notice the space you are in and if you are with others.

Breathe in the richness of the whole experience.

Explore the environment with all your senses. Sense what comes alive in you?

Is there something that opens or seems possible here which surprises you?

Take time and write down your story.

Now read your story out loud as if you are telling it to a friend who is a good listener.

Imagine being the listener and write down the important aspects of the story without judgement.

Then read what you wrote down out loud to yourself.



Gathering What Came

What stands out about your moment of aliveness now?

- What does this doorway into your soul reveal?
- What feels true or right about who you are?
- What strengths and gifts begin to emerge?

- Write something about the positive aspects of yourself encountered in the deep aliveness.
- Allow spirituality, connection, environment, relationships and more to come.
- Circle or underline key words, phrases, or other symbols.

My Example of Deep Aliveness

My experiences of deep aliveness point to a connection with an opening to beauty, wonder, awe, relationships and wanting to share this with others.

My key words:

- **Connection**
- **Relationships**
- **Sharing with others**



Crossing the exercises

Now I want you to take what you wrote down from the first exercise on wounds and gifts and what you just wrote down about a moment of great aliveness. Reflect on both and notice how they can inform each other.



My example from exercise #1

Sensing the Wound

- My experience with education left me feeling inadequate, less than, and like I was a failure.
- Out of that grew a persistence for enduring hardship, embarrassment, and shame.
- What was initiated in me was my gift of sitting with people in their darkest moments. I know what that feels like, and it doesn't scare me.

My Key Words from Exercise #2

Experience of Deep Aliveness

From my moments of deep aliveness I discovered my key words are:

- **Connection**
- **Relationships**
- **Sharing with others**



♥ Let's pause.



My example from exercise #2

Crossing the exercises

What I have learned through moments of deep aliveness is that being in dark places with others, are really moments of profound connection, beauty, and sharing. I learned about that through feeling alone, isolated and hurt.

The story trying to live through me involves teaching and sharing how to listen and connect with others.

Connection helps me feel alive. It is what I really was needing when I was alone. It is what I am doing with all of you today.





Now you try

- Find a way to include your wound, your gifts and deep aliveness.
- There is no right way to do this. It is more an exploration of qualities of you.
- Take a little time to reflect and write.



You are Unique!

- *You are something that nobody else is.*
- *You have a living understanding of the world, and the universe, that nobody else has.*

- Gene Gendlin



♥ Let's pause .



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“*I wanted to have a somatic offering for therapy clients - and this works: Focusing helps to shift the experience of carrying trauma in the body.*”

- Michelle Henderson, therapist and SFI graduate



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