



Massage Today

November, 2001, Vol. 01, Issue 11

The Long Path of Healing

By Keith Eric Grant, PhD, NCTMB

"This is (the) secret for today: Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue."

- *Eugene O'Neill (The Great God Brown)*

The recent tragedies in New York and Washington, D.C. have brought both great sadness and, paradoxically, a new spirit of working together to heal our wounds. Even as the sense of crisis and shock begins to abate slightly for many of us, the long-term efforts of coping with loss and moving onward toward integration and healing are only beginning for those directly affected. The full impact of the losses will be years in its unwinding. Many will need understanding and nurturing touch, now and into the future. There will be many opportunities in which our skills of touch and caring can help.

The effects of the tragedy go far beyond our first thoughts of those lost. Washington Post columnist Avram Goldstein wrote that, since the tragedy, doctors have been reporting an increase in pain problems.⁵ Peter Staats, chief of pain medicine at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, is quoted as saying that the reactions leave no doubt about the strength of the mind-body connection. "Pain more than any other area of medicine has the mind and the body interlinked," said Staats. When our sense of safety and our perception of a reliable future are upended, the resulting tension and anxiety take root in our bodies until we can restore a positive framework of deep interconnection, support, and social cohesion.⁷

The effects of the tragedy also extend deeply into the next generation. Amy Waldman of the *New York Times* wrote about the unprecedented number of young children who simultaneously lost a parent, sometimes their only active parent, in the destruction.⁸

"From the Cantor Fitzgerald bond-trading firm alone, the estimate is staggering: 1,500. Not the number of victims. The children they left behind. No list of children who lost a father or mother at the World Trade Center or the Pentagon, or on the four planes that terrorists took to fiery ends, has been compiled. But the number of bereft youngsters will probably stretch into the thousands... It is a generation in its infancy, with possibly thousands of children under 12. Many are so young they will have no memory of their parents, let alone how they died."

Waldman goes on to comment on the magnitude of the load placed on surviving parents and on social workers in caring for and counseling the affected children. Thousand of those lost were young parents with correspondingly young children. Having lost my own father in a civil aviation crash when I was four, I well appreciate that these losses plow an emotional furrow that extends into the bedrock of a child's personality. Maxine Harris 6 is correct in characterizing such a loss as being "forever." She notes the tendency of children who have suffered the early loss of a parent to become overly and prematurely responsible and independent. There will be much to do in reteaching affected children how to play and how to trust and rely on the world of friends around them.

In assisting the healing of trauma and stress, we are practitioners of touch, not psychologists. Yet, in bringing people back to the inner awareness and subtle sensations of their body, what Eugene Gendlin⁴ calls the felt sense, we can do much to initiate a healing response. It is on this foundation that the body-oriented trauma-healing therapies of Carolyn Braddock,² Clyde Ford³ and Peter Levine⁷ find the basis for their success. It is also on this foundation and level of body and touch that we can work to move our world society and culture toward the sanctuary and sane society envisioned by Sandra Bloom.¹

In 1995, my friend and fellow massage instructor, Maureen Manley, journeyed to Croatia with a troop of dancers and musicians. Their declared goal was to work with the children and women in the refugee camps; to use their music and dance to bring some small sense of joy and play to lives overturned by war and chaos. While there, she worked with the women, providing and teaching to them the basics of massage, so that they could begin to help each other to heal. Manley observed that:

"Massage is a direct way of communicating with the nervous system. Even when people have preconceptions in their minds about massage, the nature of the work speaks directly to the body and the body responds."

In practicing and teaching bodywork, I have noted that sometimes the most profound interventions appear superficially simple. It takes little in kinesthetic practice to lay a hand gently upon someone's chest or abdomen in a manner to actively pace their pattern of breathing. It also is not particularly difficult to ask a client to experience their sense of breathing and the sensation of the area in which your hand is upon him or her. Yet the result can be both profound for the client and difficult for the touch practitioner. The profoundness comes from the simple acts of encouraging sensate awareness and in pacing the essential life rhythm of breathing.^{2,3} The difficulty comes not in the technique itself, but in the focus and awareness required in staying present and sensing the series of slight physical transitions a client may experience - shifts in the felt sense.⁴ Even starting from such profound simplicity, there is much to be done, and much that we can accomplish together.

References

1. Bloom, Sandra, 1997: *Creating Sanctuary - Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies*, Routledge, New York, ISBN: 0-4159-1858-8.
2. Braddock, Carolyn, 1995: *Body Voices: Using the Power of Breath, Sound, and Movement to Heal and Create New Boundaries*, PageMill Press, ISBN: 1-8792-9005-7.
3. Ford, Clyde, 1999: *Compassionate Touch --The Role of Human Touch in Healing and Recovery*, 2nd ed., Publishers' Group West, ISBN: 1-55643307-7.
4. Gendlin, Eugene, 1982: *Focusing*, Bantam Books; ISBN: 0-5532-7833-9.
5. Goldstein, Avram, "Terrorism Tied to Jump in Pain Problems," *Washington Post*, October 1, 2001, Page A01.
6. Harris, Maxine, 1996: *The Loss That Is Forever: The Lifelong Impact of the Early Death of a Mother or Father*, Plume, ISBN: 0-4522-7268-8.
7. Levine, Peter, 1997: *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma: The Innate Capacity to Transform Overwhelming Experiences*, \$15.95, ISBN: 1-55643-233-X.
8. Waldman, Amy, "Anguish for Vast Toll of Children Left Behind," *The New York Times*, September 23, 2001.

Click [here](#) for more information about Keith Eric Grant, PhD, NCTMB.



Page printed from:

http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2001/11/07.html?no_b=true