

FAITH AND TRAUMA: THE SHATTERED SOUL

Presented to

Battlemind to Home Mental Health Summit
September 22, 2016

Clyde Angel, DMin., BCC, LPC
John Sullivan, LCSW



VA
HEALTH
CARE

Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

SPIRITUALITY

- ❖ Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred.
- ❖ Spiritual distress arises when one of these relationships that provide meaning is threatened or broken... the individual becomes disconnected from their system of beliefs ... there is conflict between a person's held values and perceived reality.
- ❖ Spiritual recovery is a journey of establishing, rethinking, and redefining one's sense of self and relationship to life.

TRAUMA = WOUNDING

Wounding occurs on many levels:

- Initial Wounding (The Trauma Event)
 - Secondary Wounding
 - Third Level of Wounding
 - **Fourth Level of Wounding**

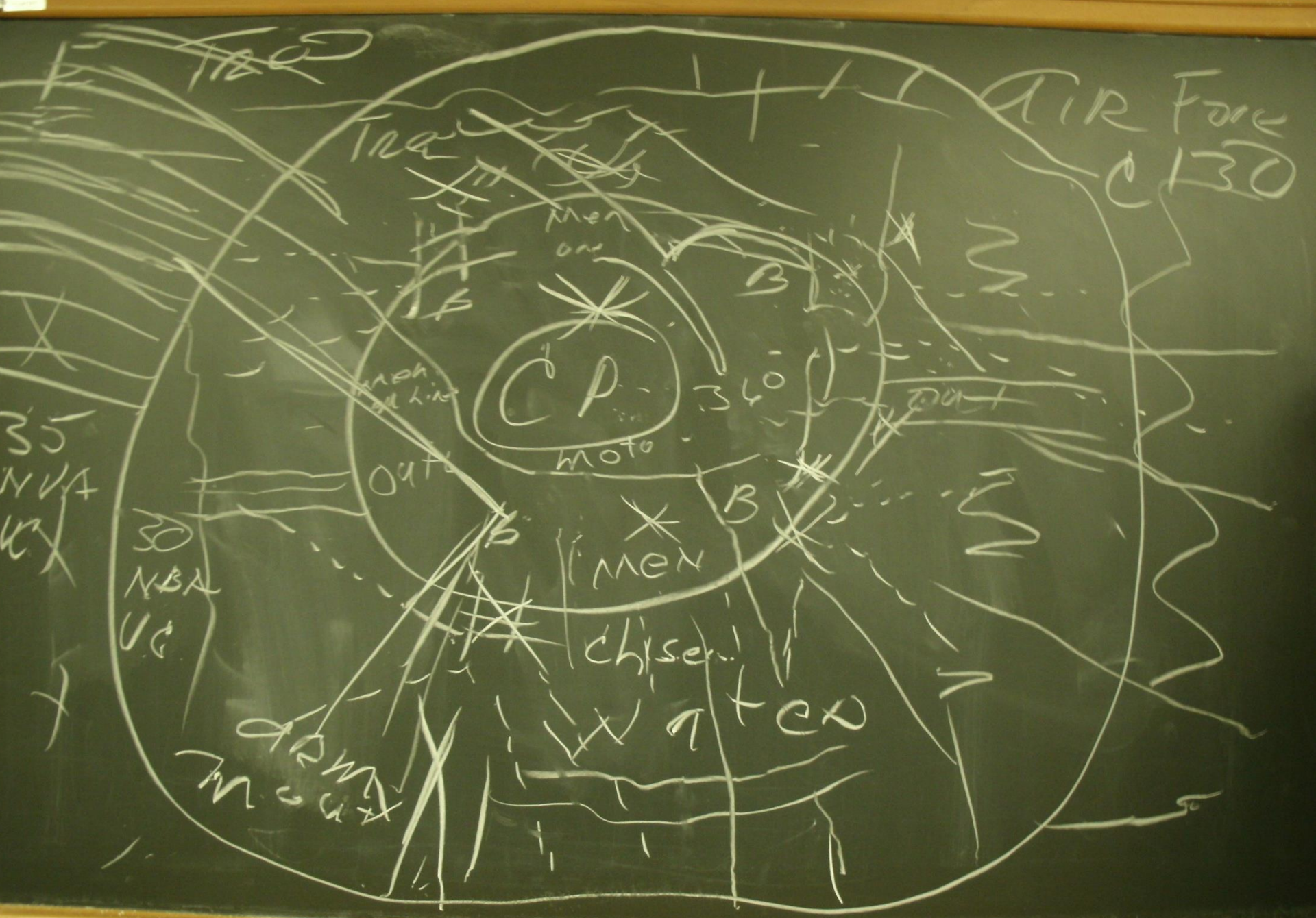
TRAUMA

- Trauma is about wounding
- The initial wounding is the trauma event

Trauma as defined by patient:

Trauma = earthquake & *Flashbacks* = aftershocks.

The metaphor of an earthquake is a good one because a trauma event can shake one's very foundation. This is what prompts some to remark, "When x happened, nothing seemed to matter anymore." While others say, "At my core, I'm NOT the same."



SHAME AND SECONDARY WOUNDING

The degree to which some trauma victims feel shame for past deeds coupled with being shamed during secondary wounding experiences sets them up to be hypervigilant and hypersensitive regarding reactions from others including providers.

Therefore be especially aware of your most subtle reactions and have clarity about what you are reacting to as the patient relates his or her trauma event.

SECONDARY WOUNDING EXPERIENCES

These experiences include the trauma victim taking the risk to share with another person some of what happened to him/her only to have that person respond by:

- **disbelieving or discounting them**
- **blaming them**
- **stigmatizing or negatively judging them**
- **denying them promised or expected services**

AN UNWELCOME HOMECOMING IN THE SECULAR WORLD

“I was walking through the airport after we landed from Viet Nam, wearing my greens with my medals. I felt like a Christmas tree all lit up. Two women came up and cursed at me, calling me a murderer and the lights on my Christmas tree went out.”

AN UNWELCOME HOMECOMING IN THE SACRED WORLD

“After 13 months in ‘Nam I was home on leave. I was 18 and when I went to ‘Nam I was 5’ 9” and weighed 170 pounds. After 13 months I was home on leave and was 6’ weighing 212. My parents asked me to attend church with them. I had outgrown my good clothes so I wore my uniform. After church the minister was outside shaking people’s hands as they left. While shaking mine he leaned forward and whispered in my ear, ‘Please don’t ever come back.’ I was floored, my parents asked me what he said but I didn’t tell them.”

AWARENESS:

Keep in mind that by the time the mental health worker meets a survivor, the survivor may be numb to acts of moral compromise. This can promote suspicion of characterological pathology. In turn, this can engender a less sympathetic response toward the survivor.

THIRD LEVEL: SELF-PERPETUATION OF SECONDARY WOUNDING

- Occurs when those who have been traumatized:
 - Deny and discount the trauma event
 - Blame themselves or view themselves as **deserving** what happened as well as the negatives they've experienced in life
 - Sabotage attempts to help them

THIRD LEVEL WOUNDING

At this level of wounding the individual internalizes (buys into) society's perception that what happened to them was because they were:

- Incompetent
 - Inferior
 - Careless
 - Immoral

THIRD LEVEL WOUNDING

As people make the subtle move from I FEEL TO I AM
...what had been at first a feeling becomes their identity
as
they move from:

I feel Incompetent	TO	I am incompetent
I feel inferior	TO	I am inferior
I feel careless	TO	I am careless
I feel <i>immoral</i>	TO	I am immoral

The move from *I feel immoral* TO *I am immoral* is an
indication of a 4th level of wounding.....

FOURTH LEVEL OF WOUNDING

When one moves from:

“I feel immoral” to “I am immoral”

....accompanied by debilitating feelings of shame and guilt and a shattered sense of trust....

This is a reflection of fourth-level wounding. That is, wounding at the level of one's essence as in “My core is NOT the same.”

FOURTH LEVEL OF WOUNDING (CONT.)

Now “essence” and “core” are two of many euphemisms for the word “soul”.

psyche – Originally, the word meant *soul, mind, breath* and *life*. The Greeks referred to Providers at that time as “Doctor’s of the Soul”. Theirs was a truly holistic approach. The mental health profession has since jettisoned the word soul.

- At the cognitive level the patient may reframe their combat behavior as in “**I was only doing my job.**”
- However, when they trust their provider enough some add, “**I can wrap my head around saying ‘I was just doing my job’, but I still did something wrong.**”
- Cognitive restructuring may put them more at ease, but there remains a residual effect some refer to as a “**blemish on their soul**”.

THE SHATTERED SOUL

- Signature wound is loss of trust
- Compromise of one's core values or beliefs
- Trauma event is greater than the spiritual formation formed prior to the traumatic experience
- Need for Spiritual Re-Formation

D DISORDER

What exactly is the **disorder** in PTSD?

While it is true the DSM-IV lists PTSD as an anxiety disorder, it is also a

Disorder of Recovery

RECOVERY

The treatment of patients suffering from PTSD is facilitated when they are already successfully working a Recovery Program such as AA or EA. As they discover there are concepts that are interchangeable between recovery programs many gain hope and confidence that they can achieve further success in recovery.

Examples

- “Stinkin’ thinkin’” (cognitive distortions)
- “1/2 Measures” (proper medications w/o therapy or vice versa)
- “Sick as your secrets” (denial/repression/avoidance)

MORE PARALLELS - SEEKING HELP

- In the 12-Step Recovery Model people are the most highly invested in treatment when they “hit bottom”. This in part explains why it is so long before many seek help with PTSD—they eventually hit an “emotional bottom” when various means of avoiding no longer work for them.
- “I kept pushing it down, now it is pushing back.”
- As with other recovery disorders, those suffering with PTSD may have enablers who attempt to convince the patient and the provider to end treatment in its early stages as they observe the patient getting worse before they get better.

FUNDAMENTAL/BASIC

We find there are **basic** and **fundamental** questions which are common among patients. These questions demand answers until one either answers them or attempts **avoiding** thinking about them as much as possible.

AVOIDANCE IS THE LIFEBLOOD OF PTSD

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

- Why did this happen to me?
- What caused this trauma event?
- Was this a test from God?
- If it was a test, is there a way to pass this test?
- When is this test going to end?
- If it was a punishment, what did I do to deserve punishment?
- Why did I survive when others died? [SE variation on this question]
- If God has forgiven me and I have not, can I ever be forgiven?
- If God forgives me and I do not, does that place me above God?

RECOVERY

Recovery entails:

Finding **MEANING** in trauma events and Discovering **ANSWERS** to pressing *fundamental* questions related to these events

The key to recovery via *meaning* and *answers* is
ACCEPTANCE

Answers and *meanings* must be those one can ***literally LIVE with*** since “recovery” is movement *from survival mode to LIVING*.

One is better able to move on with life as the impact of memories becomes less disruptive to functioning during the course of treatment.

ANSWERS/MEANINGS/ACCEPTANCE

Answers to fundamental questions/beliefs and attaching meaning to events is ***important***.

Acceptance of these *answers* and *meanings* is ***Crucial***.

“I saw his reflection in the wall...”

COMBATING AVOIDANCE

Typical statements used as a defense mechanism by patients to avoid include:

- **No one** understands.
- **You** don't understand.
- I can't talk to **you** about this.

Response: "Here's what I do understand."

GETTING *BEYOND* THE TRAUMA

The only way to get ***BEYOND*** traumas is to go ***THROUGH*** the traumas...

this is a scary
proposition...

You can't go over, under or around them...
Avoidance will not get you ***BEYOND*** them

Avoidance is the lifeblood of PTSD

“A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND
WORDS.”



PLUMBING THE DEPTHS OF TRAUMA

Often the so-called “choices” available during a trauma event all end badly.

This can leave one with a sense of being **coerced** into **betraying one's own values**.

THE EFFECTS OF WOUNDING

- The combination of *feeling coerced* + *betraying one's own values* promotes **DEEP FEELINGS** of mistrust, anger, resentment, guilt and shame...

a gross understatement of the depths of wounding following a traumatic event.

SPIRITUAL HEALING

- **Anger Management vs. Anger Resolution**
- **Loss and Grief**
- **Shame, Guilt and Forgiveness** (to include self)

QUESTION

When patients believe they have *betrayed their* own values, morals, conscience, their essence/core or what was once referred to as *their very **SOUL*** and that they did so because every one of their so-called "choices" were morally reprehensible and emotionally devastating leaving them feeling coerced into this self-betrayal, we as providers need to ask ourselves:

Can our current approaches to treatment address the gravity and depth of one's *social-psycho-spiritual* reaction to this perceived self-betrayal?

SPIRITUAL WOUNDING

Certainly spiritual wounding involves “moral injury”. However, the cluster of symptoms that make up spiritual wounding is broader than moral injury.

SPIRITUAL WOUNDING SYMPTOM CLUSTER

- ***The Shattering of Trust***
- ***Disconnection and alienation from:***
 - *Family*
 - *Friends*
 - *One's Higher Power*
 - ***SELF***
- ***Guilt Issues***
- ***Shame***
- ***Moral Injury***
- ***Unresolved grief (so many losses)***
- ***Issues related to Conscience***

QUESTIONS



VA
HEALTH
CARE

Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this course the participant will:

- Have knowledge 4 levels of wounding resulting from trauma
- Understand the Disorder in PTSD as a disorder of recovery
- Learn concepts common to treatment of spiritual wounds related to PTSD
- Know the significance of spiritual wounding related to PTSD