

THE TRAUMATIZED HEART



“New definitions of mind-body medicine are recognizing that all forms of organization on the psychological, physical and biological levels actually are expressions of information. The transformations between mind and body are called, according to health psychology definitions, information transduction. The heart, though as yet unrecognized as such, seems to be the star performer and mediator in the mind-body communication drama.”

— Dorothy Mandel
“Spirit and Matter of the Heart”

In many ways, we are just beginning to understand the true nature of the heart and its function in the body. During the past 20 years that I have practiced heart-centered, body-centered, spiritual psychotherapy I have found myself being asked, often by men with technical backgrounds, the infamous question, “What do you DO?” As I would answer, telling them that I work with the heart, I would often be greeted with, “The heart is a mechanical pump. It goes pump, pump. There is no emotional and spiritual life to the heart. That is all metaphor.”

I knew in my gut that there was more to the heart than just the mechanical pump. I could tangibly demonstrate that there was an energetic component to working with touch, the body and the heart. Yet, for many years I did not have the scientific data or language to show people that what I knew and could do clinically was indeed scientifically grounded.

In my travels, I met colleagues who were illustrating through their work, that the heart was multi-dimensional, and did indeed have an emotional and spiritual life. Linda Russek’s research in the early 1990’s showed that the EKG of one person’s heart could be measured in the EEG of another person’s brain.¹

Another colleague, cardiologist Bruno Cortese, spoke of how heart transplant recipients would often experience a literal change of heart. After a heart transplant, not only would their health condition be remedied, but also their personality would incorporate aspects of the personality of the person whose heart they had received. The Institute of Heart Math in California has gathered a wide body of research that speaks to the energetic and neurological dimensions of

the heart. Indeed, we have a “heartbrain,” in addition to our cerebral brain, and it is a powerful force in all of our human experience.

THE POWER OF THE HEART

The heart is the first organ to form in the body. It is the organizing factor for physical formation, including brain formation. The heart contains extensive brain-like neural matter and has recently been classified as a gland because it produces its own hormone. The heart not only puts out its own balancing and regulating hormones, but also instantaneously communicates electromagnetic and chemical information to the rest of the body and to other bodies near it.²

“The heart can act as an internal pharmacy-dispensing and communicating what is needed where and when. Its rhythm and pulse can entrain all of the body’s rhythms and cycles into coherent harmony and communicate many other types of vital information as well.”³ Each person’s EKG pattern is as unique as their fingerprint. The wave variations in each “heartprint” contain information about the different organ systems and rhythms in the body. When two people touch, the heartwave of one has been seen to register in the brainwave of the other.

Research by the Institute of Heart Math⁴ has shown that the heart is the most powerful generator of electromagnetic energy in the human body:

- ♥ The heart’s electrical field is about 60 times greater in amplitude than the electrical activity generated by the brain
- ♥ The magnetic field produced by the heart is more than 5000 times greater in strength than the field generated by the brain
- ♥ The electromagnetic energy of the heart not only envelops every cell of human body, but also extends out in all directions in the space around us
- ♥ Our cardiac field touches those within 8 - 10 feet of where we are positioned (and perhaps in more subtle ways at greater distances)
- ♥ One person’s heart signal can affect another’s brainwaves, and heart-brain synchronization can occur between two people when they interact
- ♥ Research conducted at the Institute of HeartMath suggests that the heart’s field is an important carrier of information

Our mental and emotional state impacts the quality of contact we offer to another person. When we touch one another with safe, respectful, loving intention, both physically and emotionally, we call into play the full healing power

of the heart. The greater the “coherence,” a sense that life is comprehensible, manageable and meaningful, one develops, the more sensitive one becomes to the subtle electromagnetic signals communicated by those around them.

In my experience working with groups, the combined impact of the interaction of the electromagnetic fields of all the group members’ hearts creates a powerful space in which individuals can do deeper healing work than one-on-one. As one group member goes deeper and gets closer to their core, the others in the group feel the energetic vibration of this person’s “heart opening” and are touched by it — energetically as well as emotionally.

The power of the heart may extend beyond healing moments to our genetic make-up. Dorothy Mandel writes, “Genetically, cells adapt to what they perceive their environment to be. Because an event experienced in the midst of a heart response will be perceived and interpreted very differently than an event experienced in the midst of a stress response, the heart can also powerfully affect genetic expression.”

LOVE, NEGLECT AND THE ABILITY TO TAKE IN LOVE

Linda Russek, Ph.D. from the Human Energy Systems Lab at the University of Arizona did research exploring the relationship between one’s perception of parental love or neglect and health in later life. In the 1950’s, a Mastery of Stress Study was conducted at Harvard University with its then all-male student population. The study looked at the ability to cope with stress and adapt over time. Linda Russek conducted 35-year and 42-year follow-up studies along with her colleague, Gary Schwartz, Ph.D.

Bio/psycho/social/spiritual interviews were conducted with study participants. The results were quite conclusive. At the 35-year mark, only 25% of participants with high positive reflections of parental love had illness in contrast to 87% of those with low perceptions of parental love. Results at the 42 year mark were similar. The study concluded that the perception of parental love is an independent risk factor in illness and one that may influence other risk factors. For instance, the perception of love was independent of family history of disease, the subject’s smoking history, the death and/or divorce of parents and the divorce history of the subject himself.

What was equally important was what Linda discovered about the relationship between love and neglect and the ability to take in love. Linda and Gary were aware that the electromagnetic field of the heart was the strongest field in the human body and that you can literally measure one person’s heartbeat in another person’s brainwaves even when they are not touching. They studied “interpersonal heart-brain registration” with their research subjects. In simple language, how open were the participants to recognize and receive love?

Linda Russek comments, “We discovered that those people, now in mid-life, who perceived their parents as loving, just and fair when in college, were more open to loving energy and were more able to receive my energy. There was more of an energy registration of my electrocardiogram in their brain, because they were not defended against receiving my love. In contrast, those participants who came from backgrounds they perceived as neglectful were more defended against receiving love.”

“All disease today has been identified as having a lowered heart rate variability association,” notes Linda. “That refers to the beat change in heart rate, particularly as it increases and decreases with each breath. So, people with a high heart rate variability have beat-to-beat changes that increase with inspiration and decrease with expiration. This is considered healthier. In essence, these people are more engaged in and connected with life. The flexibility of the heart’s variability is what is healthy. This directly relates to a person’s emotional capacity for love. A healthy heart has a lot of space to feel and process whatever emotion is necessary to be alive and present — to flow through all experience.”

People who have a lowered beat-to-beat ratio, which is connected to most diseases, are less engaged and connected to life. People whose hearts are ill are crippled and limited in their ability to respond to and take in what is offered in life. Before they die, they have a heart that beats like a clock — rigidly. This is very dangerous.

A person whose heart is rigid has less space to feel experience in any moment or to process and output emotional experience. Their experience of relating hits a wall. There is a limit to the degree that person fully engages emotionally with themselves or someone else. The pain and stress of hitting the wall can be life threatening. While perhaps this is a chicken and egg situation, there is certainly a correlation between heart disease and defenses against love.

ENCOUNTERING THE TRAUMATIZED HEART

When I was 16-years-old, a stranger tried to rape and murder me. I was walking home one night from my job at Fenway Park in Boston, having taken public transportation home. As I passed the Brigham’s restaurant where I had my second job, a stranger jumped out from the shadows and tried to strangle me. I tried to fight him with my physical strength, but he was 6’2.” I was just a 5’6” teenage girl, and no matter how physically fit I was, I was outmatched.

I tried to fight him with my mind, telling him the legal implications of what he was doing. That just made him mad. As he dragged me into an alley and started beating me, I realized I was powerless. I prayed to the God I was never raised to believe in to help me save my life.

God said to me, “If you are going to live, you must agree to what I have put you on this earth to do. You must follow the mission you know deep down in

your heart. You must come out of your introverted closet, use what you know and speak.” I said yes to God and chose my life. I realized this was a turning point for me, and the commitment I had just made was very powerful. A moment later, a little voice in my heart said, “Tell this man you forgive him.”

Without a thought or understanding of what forgiveness meant, I opened my mouth and spoke from my heart with deep sincerity, “I forgive you.” This rageful stranger stopped beating me for a moment, almost in shock, and burst into tears.

“I don’t want to be doing this,” were his first words. I lay there in the alley on my back, naked, present to the moment, and in shock myself. I remained emotionally present to this man, who only the moment before was the perpetrator of violence towards me. He began to pour out his life story. The floodgates opened, and what a story he had to tell!

He had raped and murdered other women. If he ever was caught, he would put a gun to his head and take his life, he told me. This man was so broken-hearted and powerless. In his rage, he seized me not as a person, but as an object for his aggression. In doing so, he could have taken my life. And here, by a twist of fate, I was holding a heart space for him to release his pain! My heart began to ask who the victim really was.

Just as he was done catharting, he seized his hand into a fist, as though he was going to start beating me again. My stomach tightened with a knot of anticipation. God was with me, and a car came down the alley. The man grabbed his pants and ran away.

My friend Brenda once shared with me an image she had seen in her mind’s eye. She saw a traumatized little boy sitting at the control panel for a nuclear bomb. This little boy had been briefed fully on the meaning of pressing the button, and all the horrible consequences that would result from such an action. He had been told in minute detail why it was important never to push that button. But because of the deadness in his own body and heart, all the words were like raindrops, falling beyond him, of no consequence. So he pushed the button, blew up the world, and even then didn’t really understand the magnitude of what he had done.

DEFENDED AGAINST LOVE: THE TECTONIC HEART

In my body-centered psychotherapy practice, I have seen that there are some people who have experienced such deep and profound trauma, that the heart literally cuts off, numbs out and freezes, becoming essentially dead in relational matters. The trauma can be emotional and/or physical. A person whose heart is traumatized can be cold, cruel and careless in relating — untouched and untouchable in any lasting way.

In the presence of a skilled and devoted lover, a person with a traumatized heart may experience an intimate moment briefly. But the moment is soon forgotten and not integrated into their experience. They have no relational memory

of the person who touched them. The moment is just that — an isolated moment. They are essentially defended against real, healthy, sustained and sustaining love.

For most of my life, I believed love would heal all. Through experience, I have learned the painful lesson that love can only heal when it is felt for what it is. The traumatized heart is like an iron soldier, protected by a tectonic plate. This tectonic armor protects the soldier from the energetic experience of love. The risk of vulnerability, intimacy and connection is too high and, therefore, must never be undertaken. And so, this person lives in an altered state of consciousness, dissociated from their emotional body, and, most likely, dissociated from their soul.

Some men and women with wounded hearts can handle a measured amount of intimacy. Their heart wound and the tectonic plate protecting it doesn't emerge until a deeper intimacy develops. One man I knew was quite aware that deepening intimacy brought him closer to his wounded heart. He told me, "I don't let anyone get too close to me. It hurts too much." His strategy was to always date two women. By splitting his time and his emotional/sexual energy, he ensured that no one would really touch his heart.

I watched a painful drama unfold as he found himself involved with a woman who truly loved him for who he was, with whom he felt connected, and who treated him with great care and respect. While at times he admitted that he really liked the attention, and for moments could appreciate her love and care, over time he found himself distancing himself and pushing her away. When he finally broke up with her, he told her she had brought him more joy than he had ever experienced. However, with the joy also came his pain. As his heart opened, the very parts of himself that he had succeeded at keeping buried for so long surfaced. He decided he would rather give up his joy than face his pain.

This man, ultimately, could not receive and integrate real, unconditional love. I found myself wondering why some people don't recognize or respond to even the purest, most patient, loving gestures. Why do loving gestures feel like threats to people who live with severely traumatized hearts?

FAMILIAR IS SAFE

Rollin McCraty from the Institute of HeartMath offers scientific data that helps explain the neurophysiology of a person with a traumatized heart. Our fear of change, our resistance to new experience, is literally wired into our bodies.

"We can get cut off at the heart, but the loop starts in the perceptual mechanisms in the brain," says Rollin. The amygdala is the part of the brain where our emotional memories are stored — literal patterns, literal circuitry. The amygdala looks for associations and pattern matches. Certain emotional patterns become familiar and, therefore, comfortable, even if the emotional pattern is a maladaptation. We can become comfortable with being cut off from our feelings

or being fearful of having emotional relationships. We can become comfortable living with anxiety or guilt simply because living with anxiety or guilt is familiar.”

“In the case of the traumatized heart, for a person who has been hurt in the past, not being emotionally open has become the familiar pattern. When any new person appears, all external sensory input to the brain, including hearing, sight and touch, is compared to the familiar pattern stored in the amygdala and related circuitry. A change from the familiar pattern we are used to triggers an emotional response. The brain tries to make changes to get our internal experience back to the familiar. Returning to the stable baseline feels good. If we are not able to return the pattern back to the stable baseline, then it results in anxiety, fear and often projections into the future,” says Rollin.

This helps explain why a person offering healthy, present love to a person who has been emotionally traumatized is perceived as a threat rather than a comfort. The unfamiliar experience of the healthy, loving person disturbs the maladaptive status quo that has been established in the traumatized person’s neural circuitry. And the traumatized person’s circuitry seeks to remove the discomfort of the unfamiliar healthy, loving person, and return to the comfort of its maladaptive but familiar status quo. Rollin’s model explains what happened to my male friend I described earlier to a “T”.

LEARNING ABOUT THE FERAL HUMAN

Perhaps you have seen street cats that walk through alleys, make their rounds from neighbor to neighbor or live wild without the food, comfort and shelter of a home. They are called “feral cats,” abandoned to the streets or born to animals who were already abandoned to the streets.

One of my greatest teachers about the traumatized heart and healing was a feral cat. His name was Angelo. He had been my friend and teacher for seven years when he died in 1998. Angelo first entered my life one spring day as I looked out the window and saw a big, macho-looking, mostly white cat with splotches of gray tabby markings, standing in my driveway. Emaciated, dirty and ill, Angelo arrived at my doorstep struggling to survive.

In actuality, Angelo did not arrive on my doorstep at all. My doorstep and all it symbolized was too scary for an animal worn in the cruel and neglectful ways of the human world. Feral cats are neglected, kicked, screamed at, and left to fend for themselves without food, shelter or protection. Perhaps you can see why it took many months for Angelo to actually “arrive” at my doorstep.

Building a strong enough relationship with Angelo so he could allow me to open the door of my house to him, and then he could choose freely to walk through the door and eventually stay, took much time, patience and commitment. The process of creating this safe, loving rapport with a hurt, sick and rightfully

distrustful animal taught me more about being a good therapist than any other training or experience I ever had.

Angelo, the first of seven feral cats I had the privilege of working with, was the gatekeeper to important insights into the nature of trauma, and physical, emotional and spiritual resilience. I came to see that the feral cat is not the only animal who walks the streets of life. Many of my clients have responded to the metaphor of the feral cat. Indeed, many of us feel like feral humans, walking the emotional streets of life.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF THE FERAL ANIMAL

Feral animals are quite remarkable. They are alone, often starving and injured and incredibly creative in spite of it all. Without medical care, the injured animal limps its way around the territory it calls its own. Homeless, the feral finds makeshift shelters — a garage, a shed, a crawl space under the foundation of a house. Unprotected, the feral animal is quite vulnerable to the elements and exposed to the cruelest conditions. The average feral cat's lifespan is only three years. The average house cat's lifespan is 13 – 20 years. Against all odds, the will to live and the quest to survive are strong forces in the feral soul.

The emotional costs of such a lifestyle are very clear. A feral cat lives hypervigilantly. Being alert at all times is a prerequisite for survival. Anticipating any potential threat, the feral animal does not let any signal go unnoticed. Even the most subtle cue that is impalpable to the average human being is cause for attention.

A profound lack of safety underlies the feral experience. So does a deep mistrust for human beings. After all, humans have abandoned these animals or their ancestors, and have left them to fend for themselves without the means to survive. They run from even the possibility of human contact — darting through a driveway faster than the human eye can fix on his/her presence. The feral animal chooses safety over nourishment or shelter. Even if it is snowing outside, and s/he is starving to death, a feral animal will not risk contact with a well-meaning person who wishes to bring him/her in from the cold.

SPIRITUAL TRAUMA AND THE LOSS OF RESILIENCE

Whether human or feline, the body and spirit have a limited capacity to respond to trauma. All our experience is recorded and held in the body. In this sense, the body is both an emotional and spiritual vessel, which like all vessels, has a limit to its holding capacity. When we experience pain and trauma, our bodies have a capacity to hold, work with and heal this experience. Once we stress ourselves beyond this capacity, we overload our emotional, spiritual and physical circuits and burn out. When the pain and trauma we experience is neverending, repeated incessantly, or just too big, we exceed and damage our holding capacity.

I have found that if a person lives through one traumatic experience, there may be a spiritual strengthening as s/he moves through the healing process. When trauma is not isolated but recurrent, sometimes in subtle and insidious ways the spirit can be broken and, with it, our capacity for resilience.

Marlene is a woman who worked with me many years ago. She knows both the experience of trauma as a strengthening, spiritual turning point, and trauma as a degenerative process that compromises the life force. Now 45, Marlene reflects back on her experience of surviving from an attempted rape as a teenager. “It was really a turning point — a time the power of God really came into my life. I wasn’t raised with any religious background, so God did not really exist in my experience. Surviving this attack was a spiritual gift. I emerged internally stronger and more able to focus on meaningful pursuits in my life. I can say I found God through surviving the attack.”

Later in her life, her resilience was shattered. A relationship with an alcoholic husband who was emotionally abusive, endless legal battles over the custody of her two children, and the struggle to make ends meet as a single parent with little family support eroded her spirit. If a challenge becomes too great with an absence of emotional, spiritual and often practical support, the spirit can start to collapse.

NORMALIZING EMOTIONAL NEGLECT

As I will discuss in Chapter 2, individually and collectively, we are suffering from a cultural heart wound. The feral experience of both cats and people is just one of many byproducts of this cultural heart wound.

In her book **THE CONTINUUM CONCEPT**, author Jean Liedloff reflects that for all but the last several hundred to one thousand years of life on this planet, we have lived in a more collective tribal society. In such a society, babies are born with cellular expectations of connectedness and relatedness with self, others and all of life. As infants, we expect others to be present to us and care for our emotional, physical and spiritual needs. In the indigenous society Jean Liedloff studied, a village did indeed participate in the raising of each child. An abundance of presence, holding, touch and emotional connection were part of this way of life. Both children and adults were skilled at being with babies and younger children because they had experienced presence, holding and emotional connection themselves as they grew and matured. Each generation passed on this gift to the next.

As we have moved farther away from tribal, village and community-based societies and into fragmented, disconnected nuclear family units or broken nuclear families, the way we care for babies and children has changed. Babies and young children require tremendous presence, energy and both emotional and physical stamina. To fully attend to the needs of a baby, a young child or even an adult who is really in touch with his/her feelings requires a quality of heartspace. Heartspace is characterized by caring attention, with respect for the

emotional and physical experience of self and other. It arises in a slow, emotionally present, in-the-moment lifestyle, possible in the indigenous village Jean Liedloff studied. Neither the pace of our culture nor the priority placed on work and material acquisition supports or allows for this quality of heartspace. When we lack time to slow down and just be, or to give primary focus to our relationships, emotional neglect is normalized from the very start of life.

To compound the situation, our culture as a whole is very uncomfortable with emotions and sensual experience. When children are emotionally sensitive, they are often negatively judged for it. They are told they are too intense, too needy or too much. Rarely do children or adults get positive feedback for being in touch with their emotions and having the capability to express them. We learn it is not safe to show vulnerability. We learn through experience that when we are vulnerable, we will be judged, humiliated, hurt or rejected. We learn to fear our emotions, not honor them. In school, we develop intellectual intelligence, rarely considering emotional or somatic intelligence. Children develop into adults who lead from the head, ignore the body and protect the heart. Is it a surprise that heart disease is such a major health problem in our culture?

THE NARCISSISTIC HEART WOUND

The wound to heart and psyche that gets called narcissism occurs when a child's vulnerable and developing core sense of self is not seen or reflected back by the adults around him/her. Each child is a unique individual with special gifts and personal challenges. The child's psyche is multi-layered and both simple and complex. For any one part of the child to develop, that part needs to be seen, heard, understood and valued. Children develop and integrate the many different parts of themselves through mirroring — the experience of having an adult bear witness to who they are at an essential level and reflect it back.

Recently, I was talking with the dad of one of my son's friends who is both an artist and an art teacher. Todd was commenting that all children have the capacity to be artists. The key is having someone who can reach in and meet the child on the level at which they experience the world. I watched him do this with his 2-year-old daughter, Roma. She would draw a few lines, and he would draw a few lines in response. He would ask her what she was drawing, and she would say the legs of a doggie. He would then draw some more legs of the doggie in a similar style to hers. I could see Roma smile with delight as her dad engaged in this multi-layered, not always verbal, communication dance. Her spirit was being nourished and validated by the quality of attention she was receiving from her dad.

My heart felt warm as I watched Todd and Roma play. I could see Todd mirroring Roma's essence and Roma basking in the attention of her dad. Children

need safe contexts like this to explore and express their core sense of self. Children need adults who are grounded in their own souls so they have the emotional and psychic space to be receptive to the individual child at any moment. Too often, parents relate to children from their own unmet needs, the undeveloped parts of themselves or their impatience and exhaustion.

When a parent's own woundedness and unmet needs are the predominant force in relating to a child, the child's core sense of self can be lost, broken or undeveloped. This wound to the core sense of self is the root of the narcissism. Narcissism may include a simultaneous trauma to the core sense of self and neglect/deprivation of the core self. Healthy mirroring, much like Todd and Roma at play, reinforces a child's developing sense of self. Narcissistic mirroring breaks down the boundaries of the developing self. Overly focused on his/her personal agenda, and oblivious to the child's emotional and spiritual needs, a narcissistically wounded parent may simultaneously squish and starve a child's spirit. The child's developing self may be lost, overshadowed or never activated.

Looking at the conditions necessary for a seed to germinate provides a useful metaphor for understanding the developing self. A seed is full of potential. It contains all the raw ingredients needed to grow into the full embodiment of whatever plant it has descended from. Under the proper conditions, the seed is sparked to life. When the proper conditions are lacking, the seed may never sprout. It may remain dormant and decompose. It may also sprout and then shrivel and die.

Healthy mirroring allows for germination of soul and spirit. Narcissistic faux mirroring damages, if not destroys, the potential to germinate one's sense of self. It also damages our ability to put down roots that support our development, stunting our ability to fully engage in life. This creates emotional birth defects which are physically unexpressed but set emotional limits. These emotional birth defects stunt our capacity to be fully human and program us for failure in some ways.

NARCISSISM AND THE TRAUMATIZED HEART

The narcissistic defense can be understood as a natural response to trauma. In this case, the trauma is an interpersonal violation of the boundaries of the self. For a child, these boundaries may be fragile to start with. The narcissism-generating trauma includes elements of deprivation and neglect. The heart simultaneously starves from deprivation of essential contact and dies of toxicity as it is force-fed by the narcissistic caregiver. The child's emotional metabolism is compromised. S/he wires in emotional starvation and toxicity as a way of life. With the narcissistic heart wound, a child is unable to take in the good and release the bad.

Children who are physically or sexually abused routinely create a fantasy world to defend against an unliveable reality. For survival, they dissociate, splitting the core self into a collection of disconnected parts. We experience narcissistic wounding both as our spiritually empty culture cannot support our deepest needs and as our narcissistically wounded parents pass on their wounding to the next generation. Left unhealed, the map is set for a future trail of tears. Seeds of darkness are sown for the wounded, their mates and their offspring. This is the polar opposite of the experience of the children Jean Liedloff wrote about in **THE CONTINUUM CONCEPT**.

The Traumatized Heart	The Vital Heart
reduced coherence — loss of sense that life is comprehensible, manageable and meaningful	high coherence — experiences life as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful
defended against love	open to love
untouchable or less touchable — emotionally and physically	touchable — emotionally and physically
rigid	flexible
limited self-expression	free self-expression
afraid of intimacy	welcomes intimacy
isolated and disconnected	well connected
tense and hypervigilant	relaxed and at peace

HEALING THE TRAUMATIZED HEART

When I first started to build a relationship with Angelo, the feral cat mentioned earlier in this chapter, he would not stay in my driveway long enough to even notice the food I had started to put out for him. For many months I let him be, as he expressed his sense of terror and kept his distance. It was a long while before he felt safe enough to check out the food I had provided. And for a while Angelo could not eat the food if I were watching. He needed me to leave the food outside at the bottom of the stairs, go inside, close the door and give him his space.

At first, I never knew if Angelo actually got the food. Over time, as rapport and trust built, he would let me watch him from my kitchen window. I knew we had made progress in our relationship when I could move the food from the bottom of the staircase to the top. I both rejoiced and felt gratitude when he allowed me to open the door and be with him as he ate.

To offer healing to a being with a traumatized heart, involves:

1. ***Creating safety.*** This is the core building block on which all other pieces lie. To create safety, one needs both to respect the unique needs and pacing of an individual being, and to cultivate a sense of internal spaciousness. When one is internally spacious, one has both the time and psychic attention to just be with another and no agenda other than honoring the being as s/he is.
2. ***Offering presence.*** Being present with no strings attached is paramount. Any offerings — food, shelter, emotional support, or touch — need to be made without any attachment to how they are received. When I cared for Angelo, I was not looking for appreciation or a particular response. I cared for him as a pure act, complete in itself. Respecting another's free will is essential. Some beings will simply choose not to make contact or connect.
3. ***Managing your own psychic energy.*** This skill involves a sensitivity to both how physically close or distant you are to another, and how you stand in relationship to the other emotionally and spiritually. Sometimes a person needs your energy to be pulled back in order to have space and safety. At other times, the person may need to feel the strength of your commitment to them, while also feeling your non-attachment to outcomes. Managing psychic closeness and distance is an art form.
4. ***Touch with permission.*** A lot of groundwork may need to be laid before it is safe to touch a heart-wounded person. Even though Angelo was starved for touch, and ultimately needed safe touch to soften and heal, I needed to establish safety and trust at other levels first. As Angelo was ready and felt safer with me, he would come closer. My first touch was greeted with a swat. In time, Angelo sought me out. For the longest time, I made sure to ask permission, making sure he was open to my touch. After a couple of years of this dance, Angelo chose to sleep on top of my heart every night!
5. ***Being very patient.*** Building safety and trust with Angelo took many baby steps slowly over time. Not every step seemed to be making progress. In retrospect, I am sure every patient, loving gesture was

worthwhile. The more spacious we can be in our own hearts, the more easily we can be patient with another.

BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Without recognizing our basic human needs, it is easy to overlook them. Without understanding the cultural heart wound, or the way it manifests in our own lives and hearts, we cannot invest the emotional and spiritual energy needed to heal. It is essential we find safe spaces to heal our wounded hearts and become more aware of our most basic needs. If we have not had our most intimate needs met over the course of our lives, we will both perpetuate the pattern we have suffered from and be unable to provide a new road map for self and for others. Writing this book is one step I am taking to help develop a new road map.

In 1990, my colleague Brian Schulz and I developed a list of six basic human needs. Each one is pretty simple. Yet, most of us live our lives without receiving our recommended daily allowances of most of them:

1. The need for abundant, nurturing, non-sexual touch and holding.
2. The need for full expression of emotions and a listener who responds to this expression with warmth, understanding and respect.
3. The need for play and pleasure.
4. The need for satisfying and creative work.
5. The need for a satisfying and uninhibited sexual life with a loved and loving partner.
6. The need for immersion in and contact with the natural environment.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. Have you had experiences that have made you aware of the power of the heart?
2. Can you relate to the image of the feral human?
3. Have you ever tried to love someone with a traumatized heart? If so, what was the experience like?
4. In what ways has your heart been wounded? What do you need for your heart to heal?
5. Do you think men's and women's hearts are wounded in similar or different ways? What is similar and what is different about male and female heart wounds?

6. What can we do collectively to heal our hearts and prevent heart wounding in future generations?

MEDITATION: Basic Human Needs

Take a moment to find a comfortable place to do this meditation, whether it be sitting or lying down. When you find the comfortable place, close your eyes and begin to take a few deep breaths. As you inhale, feel your body very slowly melt and relax. Take a moment to see if you are comfortable or you need to adjust your position in any way to be more comfortable.

Whenever you feel ready, allow your focus to be with your heart, noticing where you feel your heart as you hear the word “heart.” If it helps to put your hand on your heart to help focus there, you are welcome to do so. Take a moment to notice how your heart is feeling physically and emotionally. Is it full? Is it empty? Is it heavy? Is it light? Is it separate? Connected? Take a moment to let yourself become a little more familiar with whatever is happening in your heart now.

Whenever you feel ready, take a moment to look at where you are in your life with regard to abundant, nurturing non-sexual touch and holding. How comfortable are you with non-sexual touch? How available is it for you? On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is lacking and 10 is abundant, what number would you choose to describe the availability of non-sexual nurturing touch?

And whenever you feel ready, allow your focus to move to your emotional expression. How comfortable are you expressing your deepest feelings? Are there people in your life who can really hear and respect your heart? Do you seek out listeners for your emotional experience or do you keep your experience to yourself? On a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is lacking and 10 is abundant, what number would you choose to describe the availability of emotional expression to a caring listener?

And whenever you feel ready, allow your focus to move to play and pleasure. How freely do you allow yourself to enjoy play and pleasure? What are your favorite ways to play? What brings you pleasure? Are there ways you keep yourself from enjoying play and pleasure? On a scale from

1 to 10, where 1 is lacking and 10 is abundant, what number would you choose to describe the amount of play and pleasure in your life?

And whenever you feel ready, allow your focus to move to your work. How satisfying and creative is it? Does your work feel fulfilling and meaningful? Can you express your spirit through your work? On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is lacking and 10 is abundant, what number would you choose to describe how creative and satisfying your work is?

And whenever you feel ready, allow your focus to move to your sexual expression. How comfortable are you expressing your sexuality with a loved partner? How freely can you express yourself sexually? Do you have any inhibitions? How fully can you enjoy your sexuality? On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is lacking and 10 is abundant, what number would you choose to describe your sexual expression?

And whenever you feel ready, allow your focus to move to your relationship with the natural world. How much time do you give yourself to be in nature, to feel a connection with the natural world? Are there particular activities you enjoy or places you like to go to feel connected with the natural world? On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is lacking and 10 is abundant, what number would you choose to describe your sense of connection with the natural world?

And whenever you feel ready, at your own pace, you can mark your answers on the following chart. You may want to write notes in your journal too, about how well you feel you are meeting your basic human needs, and what steps you might want to take to meet them more fully.

NON-SEXUAL NURTURING TOUCH									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lacking								Abundant	
EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION TO A CARING LISTENER									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lacking								Abundant	

PLAY AND PLEASURE									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lacking					Abundant				
CREATIVE AND SATISFYING WORK									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lacking					Abundant				
SEXUAL EXPRESSION WITH A LOVED PARTNER									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lacking					Abundant				
CONTACT WITH NATURE									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lacking					Abundant				

Notes:

1. See *“Interpersonal Heart-Brain Registration and the Perception of Parental Love: A 42-Year Follow-Up of the Harvard Mastery of Stress Study,”* by Linda G. Russek and Gary E. Schwartz, Subtle Energies, 1994.
- 2, 3. From *“Spirit and Matter of the Heart”* by Dorothy Mandel, Grace Millennium, Winter 2001.
4. The research done by the *HeartMath Institute* is available on www.heartmath.org

