

Healing Cultural Trauma: Rekindling a Creative Response to Life--

An interview with Dee Joy Coulter, Ed.D.

Given what's happened in this country over the last months, could you talk about the response of cultures to trauma and your experience with cultural healing as it might work through in the current situation in this country.

I think one lens that we could use to look at the social dynamics in response to this national trauma has to do with cognitive stages, cognitive stages of individuals as well as cultures as a whole. These cognitive stages can help to explain the various reactions to the tragedy that we see in the country.

These are developmental stages?

One could say they are developmental, but I would say they are existential and they tend to follow one another because neurology allows that. The child, from about two or three, when language kicks in, until about six, is in what Piaget called the pre-operational stage of thinking. In the Buddhist view they would refer to that state of consciousness as a beginner's mind and they think of that in very exalted terms. When we look at shamen and the wise elders of non-literate cultures we don't think of them as in any way limited in their understandings or intelligence. They are using an approach that is basically pre-operational which includes looking at things in a more spatial than temporal way. There is not necessarily a sense of sequence as much as pattern. In the preoperational stage you are drawing on a great deal of intuitive engagement with the earth and with nature and you are very embodied. Your body and your mind are collaborating brilliantly and you know as much through your body as you do through your mind. It is in that kind of body mind collaboration that the pre-operational mind is exquisite. And with pre-operational thinking as the basis of the culture there was almost a guarantee of community

As we move out of that stage with literacy, we are creating what you might call a "schooled" mind, and this pulls the culture out of the body-mind intuitive approach. The schooled mind begins with what would be called concrete thinking. I think it is a serious misnomer to think that we have taken a step up however. We have rather taken a step laterally. The pre-operational child draws

heavily on the frontal lobes. The marked shift in thinking that happens at around seven in a literate culture is that the child begins to draw on the back part of the brain, the associative areas, and begins to do sequential linear concretely logical thinking. The limitation of the logic of the concrete mind is that it only handles one variable at a time and it tends then to polarize information into extremes. This is because it doesn't have the ability to fill in the gaps of a continuum or the nuances of complex strategies.

Consider this transition from pre-operational to concrete. We look at children and say, "Good! Now they can start to think. Now we can teach phonics and reversible codes of all sorts and we can state 'if this. . . then that'." We look at this fondly as a rite of passage into reason, but we haven't really paid much attention to what they have left behind, the incredible natural wisdom and the sense of the fabric of life and its rich connectivities. We may dismiss their observations as fantasy or imaginations, but these may, on the other hand, be the embodied knowing capacities of pre-operational states and cultures.

We lose this sense of embodiment in a concrete linear culture, by becoming "schooled." We can become kind of disembodied heads with the head merely thinking along in logical terms and violating its own common sense for the sake of logic. The body is no longer consulted.

Say more about that.

The body has ways of signaling if something seems true or not. Either it has a ring of truth, it feels right, it is as clear as day or it smells fishy, feels funny, or leaves a bad taste in the mouth. But, as we become educated, we learn not to be dissuaded or confused by that, and we learn to use concrete reasoning to guide our thoughts and actions. We rely on reason to measure the intelligence of our actions. And, since this early stage of reasoning lacks subtlety, our thoughts and actions will tend to be black and white and highly polarized.

A culture can also make this shift into concrete thinking once it becomes literate, and that's the cultural stage of cognition that we have in this country. In fact, while most countries begin as pre-operational cultures, we actually began with a piece of paper (the Declaration of Independence)

which means we began as a concrete culture, without any roots in pre-operational thinking. This may explain why it is so hard for us to relate well to non-literate peoples. Even as individuals, nearly sixty percent of our population is almost exclusively concrete in its thinking. I think that the government responses to the attacks of 9/11 have mostly been concrete. They have called on a polarized kind of thinking and reaction. And, they are presuming that this will engage the people. I think that's up for question in ways that it never was before. At this point I don't think the critical mass is going to rally on an ongoing basis around concrete thinking. Something has changed and, yet, it hasn't changed with the political rhetoric yet.

The next stage that you move into, ideally somewhere around age eleven or twelve, is formal operational thinking, analysis and synthesis, compare and contrast. All of the tasks of formal operational thinking are concerned with approaching some kind of nuance between polar opposites. We learn to be strategic and we learn to be good economists and bankers and WTO leaders and politicians. Law is the ultimate expression of formal thought. That kind of thinking doesn't do truth checks; it just does logic checks. So a legislative bill can be entirely logical, but it takes an ethicist to tell whether it is moral. Morality is not part of the schooled mind, only logic is. Perhaps we need the wisdom of spiritual traditions and wise elders that seeks out truths to balance the knowledge of the rational thinker who seeks out clear logic.

So, what then?

Now you get to what would be *beyond* formal operational thought. Piaget stopped at that stage, but some of the neo-Piagetian scholars and those who are looking at adult cognition are identifying this further stage of syncretic or systems thinking. It is not a developmental stage in that you have to wait until you go through concrete and formal thinking. At any time you can become embodied again, and once you do you have the capacity to comprehend whole systems. But, living systems have to be experienced, not just analyzed. So you *become* the rainforest when you become an ecologist. You have to exchange yourself for it, the Buddhist would say.

Systems thinking allows one to operate on a higher moral level than responding to mere personal needs. It is a thinking that brings together differences and works with the idea of a continuum

rather than a polarity. This was the cohesive force that organized the people in Seattle in their protest of the WTO. They were transcending their personal needs for a larger ethical purpose, regardless of what it did for the logger or the environmentalist or the farmer or the trade unionist. They had differences at the level of logic, but they didn't have differences at the level of ethics, and they gathered together to make an ethical protest. I am not aware of anything in prior history where the common people did that. Fine leaders and great statesmen have always done that. Spiritual leaders always do that. They always come from this place of intrinsically understanding the connectivity between things. So you would say there is pre-operational or pre-logical thinking, there is logical thinking both concrete and formal, and then there is systems thinking which isn't exactly based on logic. It entertains logic and it can include it, but it is larger than logic and can only occur if one is embodied.

We can see the neurology of what's involved with that shift because we are now beginning to look at the neurology of trauma. When you're traumatized your neurological connections to the frontal lobes are going to shut down. The frontal lobes are the part of the brain that the pre-operational child and the pre-operational culture draw on. They are also the part of the brain that the systems thinker uses. Only that part of the brain can handle multiple constantly changing variables. It is also the seat for empathy and altruism. You can affiliate with your own kind at lower levels of brain functioning, but to care for *all* beings requires a systems understanding of relationships. When we use the frontal lobes in conjunction with the limbic system, the seat of emotion, so emotionality blends with the capacity to see all things interconnected, that's where empathy and altruism become possible. That's also where anticipation of consequences and really elegant impulse control become possible. So the really complex thinking and the heart qualities come together in frontal lobe thinking. We can then refer to that as systems thinking. I hesitate to call it a stage because I think it's possible to operate like that at any age and in a culture at any stage, because it has a physically based wisdom and it is not dependent on logical thought. We access this capacity for body-based wisdom by activating the neural connections that link body to mind. Only the frontal lobes are wired to be able to make this connection. This also means the "talking heads" among us simply "can't get there from here", for the crucial thing for its operation is to be in our bodies. Unfortunately, we are all susceptible to losing that precious connection if we are traumatized. In a trauma response we don't have access to the frontal lobes because they close

down. They are not available to us until we can get back to a state of calm, and then return to being “embodied”. So when this event of September eleventh occurred, it popped most all of us out of our bodies, out of our integratedness and so we were no longer embodied. We went into a reaction pattern that is the normal thing to do when trauma occurs. We were shocked, displaced from ourselves.

In those first days, all anyone was hearing was black and white rhetoric: good and bad, freedom and terrorism, and other language that was very polarizing, This is the first reaction, as if under trauma our frontal lobes close down and we slide down our own neurological ladder into more emotional, survival-oriented parts of the brain. We slide into the schooled mind and on down to the very concrete level of it.

If we look at this in terms of another hierarchy within the brain, it drops us down to a core area concerned with fear. This is the basal ganglia, sometimes called the reptilian complex that monitors territoriality and boundaries. So, as our traumatized collective consciousness drops down, there is all of this war-like rhetoric that has to do with our boundaries being violated and the consequent humiliation and helplessness. This is, followed by a sense of rage and a desire for retaliation and the need for reestablishing the boundaries and creating safety. Those are the concerns, in trauma, when we drop back down to a feeling of entrapment and being at risk. It is a perfectly natural, understandable response and indeed we do need to establish safety in order to come back into ourselves and come back into the highest capacities that we have. Ideally, we would want to respond from a systems point of view. We would want to respond in a world-sensitive way because the entire world is in jeopardy if we respond foolishly or if we react instead of responding appropriately in keeping with the whole rather than with personal needs.

So when we look at the cultural responses that were articulated by our leaders right after 9/11, which were coming from the retaliation, revenge, self-protection point of view, how do we move? There are those of us that take the systems point of view for granted and say “Of course we are all interrelated and of course our actions will have repercussions.” What is the connection between the larger culture as articulated by our leaders and those of us who see the systems view and are tending to talk about peace and nonviolent options for redressing the wrongs? It seems to me that there are two very different mindsets in the country.

We now have a number of people who are operating through the lens of a systems view and looking at circumstances through the dynamic connections and interrelationships, and there are those who aren't able to do this right now. But, it is not a static number on either side, and we can see that even in the opinion polls we are dropping from ninety-five to eighty, to sixty percent wanting some sort of war like response. We have seen some shift already and this is obviously surprising the political system. In past wars, there was a predictable sequence of public opinion and action. They knew that if this is what the public was saying then that is where it would go. And there would always be a certain minimum number of protesters who wouldn't be very effective. Well that was a different time when there was a very different cognitive situation. We are still struggling to recover from trauma, so many people who would have moved naturally toward a systems view cannot yet do so. We simply must take the time and care to heal ourselves in our efforts to move into the cognitive potential of our times. This is the information age, no longer the industrial age. That was a world of inventions which were based on "if this . . . then that" so that everything in the material culture was supporting the concrete mind. But this isn't how the worldwide web, a primary invention of the information age, works. We have kids now who are neurologically formed—and informed--by the internet and the web. It has taken me a lot of time in my life to get to where I have something approaching an intrinsic sense of connectivity. But, they grew up wired like that so it's automatically available to them in a way that it wasn't to prior generations.

The systems perspective is their world-view.

That's right, because it *is* a web. When you start thinking in web like fashion, whether it is across time or space, it creates a radically different perspective. What we *are* doing is starting to think in patterns. We can see now, in a patterned way, things that only the great mathematicians could see before. Their minds could take the linear logical formulas and speed them up so much they saw the patterns that were generated. Now, we are also becoming able to think that way and perceive that way with the help of computer generated models. We now have a culture that has the capacity to hold a systems view of the world regardless of where it lies in the schooled mind continuum.

In those first few days after the attack we heard little except very concrete rhetoric. Then came the strategists with all the calculated “this is how the terrorists work” and “here is how we are going to respond.” It sounded like big chess games and was a sign of an advanced stage of the schooled mind—the formal thinker. There was still no connection to compassion or concern for “the enemy” but the thinking became much more complex. Now in very short order we are hearing people say “You know, I feel like I am part of a community of the world.” This comment was made on AM talk radio, and we are getting independent journalists and newspapers coming out with discussions of why we are so hated. Students are going to teach-ins to learn the history, geography, and economics of the situation, convinced that there must be more to it than “they don’t like freedom.” You are seeing that perspective just inundating e-mail as well, and radio programs like “Democracy Now” are reinforcing the view that this is not a black and white world situation. Wherever there is an opportunity to speak out in a less syndicated, less corporately sponsored way, you are hearing an enormous amount of collaborative, systems thinking. Opportunities for participating in solutions of a different sort are increasing. . . I think we’re seeing an enormous ground swell of systems response; people are saying, “It’s not that simple. If you do this, won’t it trigger that?” The Seattle response to the WTO wasn’t the normative response of our people, but was a cross section of the country who gathered together and saw a higher purpose. There is no guarantee that this will happen again in response to September 11, but the invitations for dialogue and common unity must be called forth in a strong yet non-aggressive way.

In a pre-operational culture I think it is much easier for people to find common ground because a pre-operational culture has a sense of community intrinsically imbedded in it. The Africans have a saying: “A person is only a person among persons.” One’s identity is inextricably connected to the rest of the community, so if the community has been traumatized because nature just devastated their whole village they can all recover by going through a healing ritual together. The group mind of the community can experience a remedy. This deep sense of community fades away as a culture moves into concrete and formal thinking. It is replaced with a high appreciation and regard for the individual. However, these two poles—high connectivity and high individuality need to be brought together and harmonized. Neither extreme of unindividualized community or disconnected individualism is appropriate or healthy for our modern times.

There is a way in which the pacifist approach has a strongly feminine leaning. If you look throughout nature, non-aggression is valued by the females because they have the offspring. They are the ones that stay in the nests and attend to the community, the rearing of young, and the properties of the hearth. So they are dealing with the cooperative aspect of living systems. Yet, living systems can't function with just the cooperative and integrative aspect. If we all just cooperated with no distinction among ourselves—no boundaries--we would be a herd of amoebae! We would have no differentiation. If we look at our own bodies, we have so many varied kinds of cells. We are the maximally differentiated critter on the planet. We have so many differentiations of our cells and they are so elegantly integrated that we can function as a complex organism. But, we have to have *both* integration and differentiation. When you don't have integration, and you do have individuation you have cancer. That's a cell that's got a mind of its own. It is not participating in the game plan here. So it doesn't help to just have individuation and it doesn't help to just have integration. The health and complexity of an organism or system rests on the interrelationship of the two. It's the *individual within the community*. They are in an exchange, in dialectic. Those two seeming opposites become integrated with one another. It's only at a systems level of thinking that this seeming paradox can be resolved.

How does this relate to the issue of boundaries and the feeling of safety versus violation we spoke of earlier.

Community, cooperation, hearth, peace, and getting along all exist inside a bounded area. You can become so focused on the idea of peace that you don't see that the only reason that you can even have a conversation about peace is because there is a *space within which* to have the conversation. Somebody or something is providing a boundary so you don't have to deal with that.

Dealing with being attacked?

Yes, we tend to take for granted that our space is guaranteed. Within that space now we can talk about peace. It worries me a bit if we have some people talking about peace and other people talking about war. What we need is to understand that there can be a position that integrates and transcends those two polarities. This could happen if people address not just the desire to make peace, but also the *boundary* issue in a way that makes some sense to those who are narrowly

focused on the transgression of our boundaries. We need a solution that can alleviate the feelings of panic, threat, and humiliation, as it works toward peace with safety. Then we would see people able to unite around a common cause—the peaceniks and the warriors could truly lie down together.

Yet, there tends to be such a stark contrast between people who want to respond and retaliate with war versus the people who say, “No, we need peace.”

If you say that there are “people who are concrete” and “people who are systems thinkers” then you have stopped time. It’s not that rigid. This is a tragedy that’s *unfolding*. We are all going through various adjustments. We all slid down our neurological ladder. We are all climbing back out, each in our own time. You cannot make a concrete thinker instantly become a formal thinker, but people are able, overnight, to become systems thinkers. You can be a systems thinker, whatever else you are. All you have to do is get back in your body and open up in a body/mind way to what’s happening.

So what does that mean to people who don’t have some kind of a body-based practice or a spiritual practice that includes breathing? When you say “all it means is getting back into your body”, can you be more specific about how people can do that?

First, you have to look at why people jump out of their body awareness in the first place we jump out of it because it’s too fearful. . And we jump out in a couple of different ways. One of the ways of responding to trauma is to become dissociated. This is a common response of females because they often don’t have the power to be aggressive and either fight or flee, so they go into a freeze mode. The really young boys will do this as well. But, usually the older boys, by the time they get to be about eight to ten, respond to trauma by becoming hypervigilant and they get feisty or hyperaroused.

So that will tend to be the boys and men’s response.

Yes, but to separate it as crudely as that, to say it is totally gender related is artificial. There are females that jump to hyperarousal and there are males who tend to dissociate. Be that as it may, neither one works very well as a response to trauma, and in both cases it is a reactive mode. In

both cases there is a fundamental feeling of a lack of safety and a lack of options. So if you are wanting people to shift their response pattern you have to persuade them that you will address that which has gotten them so polarized into those response patterns. So for the dissociated ones you have to create some sense of safety. For the hyper-aroused you must deal with the threat behaviors. If you have got people that are saying, "We've got to go to war!" this is a very natural trauma response of hyperarousal. They are going to *keep* saying that until you persuade them you've got a better idea that means that we don't have to go to war. But, you had better be dealing with the threat to boundaries aspect of it. We have to really find a way to comfort and invite people to return home to themselves and to their bodies. We have to make the bodily home safe enough to return to, and we have to understand what drove them out. What are their basic fears, how can we honor and protect? The dissociated ones need to be much more a part of community. They have to know things are being taken care of. You can't totally guarantee safety, but you can guarantee relative safety and a way of life that has some dignity for one another. They need to know that they are seen and don't have to feel so completely isolated; they need to feel they are cherished.

And with the hyper-aroused, hyper vigilant reactions?

You have got to give them "right actions." I am fascinated with the Red Cross for instance. It will go into a disaster area, where we have a trauma, and everybody is freaking out, and the first thing they will do, as I understand it, is to single out the adolescent males and say "Okay guys! Here is the spray paint, here are the stakes, here are the mallets, here is the string, here is the map. I want you to set-up a first-aid station over there. I want the latrines over here. I want the beds over there, the kitchen over here."

So you engage them in physical activity. . .

It is not just physical activity. It is creating boundaries. They create the boundaries of the temporary residence.

What might that look like in this particular situation? I mean what would creating the boundaries for the hyper-aroused reactive, war-like response be in our culture?

At the primary level, it is “How are you are going to manage the risk of the next event?”. One of the things about a trauma response is that when you don’t have an advance warning system, you can’t calm back down. So we need to figure out logistically and strategically how to respond. You see that with policies and procedures, such as having an armed guard on every plane, for example, so that they have got a way to reduce the likelihood of that particular event happening again.

So the first thing to do is to reduce the threat.

Yes, and then once you reduce the active threat, the next issue arises: the need for retaliation. That one is very tricky because it is easier to retaliate if you don’t understand the nature of the other side. A lot of people don’t even know Afghanistan has got mountains. Nor do they know that the people are basically starving and that the longer that aid is interrupted because of bombing, the more it will impact innocent people. So little by little the picture of Afghanistan ceases to be some imaginary spot where there is nothing but warriors who are trying to hurt us, and people begin to get a feel for what it really is. It is a little more elusive. The target is not so concrete. As the target becomes more diffuse and more complex, concrete thinking isn’t very useful. So, then we need to have a broader picture. By having more invitations to get into more complex thinking you have more opportunity to bring in pictures that trigger compassion. Then you can begin to say that maybe we have to build things, instead of just tearing things down. You can practice seeing the whole, and watching it, and holding it in your body as a complex dynamic.

That’s the systems response.

Yes, and the more we can see that way, and the more we speak from that perspective, and the more we are able to hold this complex, rich picture, the better we become at attending to the needs of the hyper-aroused and the needs of the dissociated among us. We have to pay attention to meeting their needs or they will not settle. And we’ve got a large chunk of our people who still are not knowing how to cope.

At the same time we can no longer say “The good guys are over here having peace marches and those guys over there are causing war.” No, those guys are in trauma and they need to hear that you’re going to *do* something, something measured; that you understand that they are trying to protect our boundaries. It is a genuine human instinct and it should be honored.

Let’s go back to the question of embodiment. If embodiment is a prerequisite for that systemic awareness, how do you talk to people about ways of becoming embodied?

Many of our culture’s best frontal lobe activities are the community building ones. Athletics is a good example. Any peak performance is a frontal lobe operation, and kids who are really involved in sports are watching their sleep, watching their food, and learning to stay in their bodies and stay present. That’s been one way that people have done it for a long, long time. Music is a frontal lobe activity, by and large. The more we bring back diverse musicality and dance, theater and playfulness, the more we are going to see people connecting to one another and returning to their bodies. Those are frontal lobe functions. The visual arts are also useful to get back into the frontal lobes. So, we need to look at the schools and say “What do you mean you are cutting out all the so-called ‘specials’?” These were the things that allowed a child to think and engage socially at the highest levels. The higher order thinking skills are frontal lobe skills. It is the art and the music and the P.E. that cultivate the frontal lobes from which the academics need to be done, if you want to do well. We have a golden opportunity through the children and schools to return our culture to a safe community. As they practice this systems way of behaving they bring this calmness and hopefulness home to their families. It can be a powerful catalyst for the growth of the whole culture.

I still want to get back to the need for embodiment. You are talking about the long term answer of what needs to happen in the school system and through child raising, but is there a short term answer in terms of how to bring about or encourage that kind of embodiment that leads to systemic awareness?

I really suspect that the systemic awareness is already there in a great many people, and the only reason it doesn’t kick in is that we are freaking out and are beside ourselves. But I think the self that we return to is already pretty well prepared to sense connectivity. When the people return to

their bodies as the trauma abates and the rhythm of life begins to return, some of the cultural fabric itself arises. But, the question in *our* culture is where are the folk dances and the songs, and where are the potlucks and the celebratory communal activities? It's the ordinary things that are interactive that will bring back that sense of cultural safety, I think. If once a week somebody *really* saw you and you really saw them and you cherished what you saw, that is about all our systems are designed to handle.

Those who have had a practice of staying in their bodies need to step up and take that job on. "Unto whom much is given, much will be demanded", says the Biblical injunction. Those who have that sense of presence, who have the gift of being able to be fully present in their enlivened, intuitive body, have a job to do. They need to listen to the suffering of the one who thinks he has to go to war, of the one who thinks she doesn't dare go out of her house anymore, of the people in Afghanistan, of children in the Rio de Janeiro streets or whomever.

What does it really mean to be in your body? What does it mean to someone who is very caring but primarily intellectual, or to someone who is still in trauma response? How would you articulate what it means to be to be embodied?

If you are going to appeal to the intellect you say that the mechanism you are trying to go for is to engage the frontal lobes, not just rational thinking. And, when you are successful at that it taps into the empathy and the altruism capacities. So, when Thich Nhat Hahn says, "Be peace and smile," he is making a brilliant neurological suggestion. Smiling actually alters the temperature of the blood in the frontal lobes by about 3/10ths of a degree. We have a physically cooler head and that makes it easier for us to think calmly. And, we also know that if you breathe through your nose instead of your mouth, it cools the nasal cavity further contributes to your having a "cool head!" A rioter, for instance, is always going to be breathing through his mouth and grimacing. Then the blood drops straight down and he stays hotheaded. So we can see that cool headedness is a valuable thing.

There are postural alignments that allow us to have a lot of heart lung integration and rhythmicity. When the heart and lung are working in synchrony with one another, as they are with aerobic

exercise and as they are with music and with rhythmic movement, there is a body-mind connection.

Another way to bring about that rhythmicity of heart and lung is by conscious, aware breathing.

Or just take a walk! Just taking a walk, dancing, singing is extraordinary. If people sang it would solve 9/10th's of the problem, because it is aerobic, it is frontal lobe stimulating, it is uplifting. Singing has a more embodied voice quality than just ordinary speech.

Another thing that strengthens frontal lobe functioning is enough sleep. There is a minimum amount of sleep below which you get reactive and lose the ability to organize your responses. After a trauma we know that we are running into sleep deprivation and so there needs to be enough return of security and enough tending to ourselves that we can get a decent sleep.

Another important aspect involves creating a balance to the metabolism by eating warm food. Under stress people tend to forage and graze, so they either get something cold out of the refrigerator or lukewarm off the counter, but they don't heat anything. Just fix oatmeal for breakfast for a few days in a row. It's warm. It is nourishing. By bringing more warmth to the metabolic system, more warmth on a literal level, it can bring more warmth of exchange. Also, try drinking warm tea, for example. Some of those very mechanical things can rekindle the frontal lobes.

So we are talking about keeping a cool head and a warm body.

Yes, and a body that is moving and breathing rhythmically, breathing through the nose. Proper hydration is another important aspect. When you get dehydrated you can get really brittle and short tempered and frustration tolerance goes down.

Sometimes when there is so much change going on, we are caught up in too much that's new and overwhelming and the real need is to cultivate more familiarity. If you are not in a "nesting" mode, the biochemistry becomes skewed and we don't have enough of a neurochemical called oxytocin. Oxytocin is released in the body when you pet a critter, for example. Within thirty seconds of

petting a dog your oxytocin level goes up! Petting any furry critter, and feeding ourselves warm food, giving ourselves a ceremonial routine where we have a place mat or a candle or place to eat or we have a place to put our shoes and our keys all help. Now the familiarity is returning, a sense of nesting is returning and the “flight” response shifts. Then we are able to establish intimacy again with people.

And, of course, with the trauma that we have seen, the national trauma, it destroys the whole sense of the nest and of being in a safe place, and reinforces the idea of “Oh my God! Where can I go? What should we do?”

Yes, this is a normal biological response when a nest is violated. The natural desire is to rebuild and then protect in a more effective way. Our problem with this situation is that while we can take steps to prevent a duplication of the events of 9/11, the reality of terrorist tactics is that many unknowns still exist. Because we can't control or predict a new event, the culture is still at risk of living in a prolonged trauma state. We have a choice as individuals to move beyond a trauma response and rekindle our creative response to life and so does the culture at large.

And this, again, gets back to ways of moving beyond the trauma response to the breadth of the systemic view.

And what's important to know is that initially it is a trauma response. Right now we are looking at a culture that is in the midst of a trauma response. It is very easily cared for if we recognize, at this point, what needs to happen. We can help people recover. I think the people that have found themselves able to get back in their bodies the soonest are the ones who need to start building and healing and generating the arts and doing the listening and creating the forums for defusing the volatility of those still in trauma. So, the first ones back need to create more and more welcoming for the rest to come back, not get mad that they left. We all left.

Do you have any last thoughts about how to ease the wounds of trauma; to bridge from those that are trying to hold a systemic view of the world with those who are still caught in being reactive: waving the flag and wanting revenge?

There are really small things we can do: For instance, it makes sense to really *listen* to those folks still caught in that concrete, “either/or”, reactive state of mind. Any time you hear, “Well, we either

do this or we do that!" it is the marker that you are dealing with concrete thinking and quite possibly panic reaction, especially in people who have moved beyond that state in other times and areas of their lives. One of the best responses is, "Could we think of at least one more idea?" Now you have introduced the possibility of a middle way, and that will allow a much richer, more hopeful conversation to occur. So, any time you hear someone say "either for us or against us" the question to ask is: "Wait a minute, aren't there some other options?" and of course there are. Then you can engage with them in the brainstorming of some fresh ideas, one of which may have some merit. That would be one little thing. Such a conversation can gently guide a person away from trauma-based concrete thinking patterns and back into embodied systems thinking where true solutions can arise.

People are in a state of mind that we must see as part of a continuum. Where they are now can change as the trauma response is healed. But, the more you think that "those people are there, and we are here", the more you have gotten caught in that same concrete thinking. How they're thinking now is not necessarily how they'll be thinking tomorrow. You don't want to treat them as if that's where they are entrenched because they aren't. They are just in shock and in trauma. So, the more we can explore a softening of the heart so that they don't get stuck, the better.

There was one e-mail that I received recently that was very sweet. It was about a father who was posing this circumstance for a pre-operational child, his five-year-old daughter. He was saying, "What if we were walking through the woods and there were monsters in the woods and they liked to knock down our houses, and they eat people and stuff. What do you think we should do? Should we build a fortress, or just shoot them, or what do you think?" The little girl thought a minute and said, "I think we should feed them." You know, the pre-operational mind can answer like that, and we can all answer like that, but only if we are fundamentally safe. This is a little girl that obviously didn't have trauma, so she is coming from a view that can afford to say that. And, it's a possible response that we could all consider if our traumas were less invasive.

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