

HEALING COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

A PROCESS FOR INTEGRATING OUR
INTERGENERATIONAL & CULTURAL WOUNDS

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I

MYSTICAL PRINCIPLES OF HEALING

We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the thread of the hero path, and where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god. And where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world.

Joseph Campbell
The Hero with a Thousand Faces

The late American mythologist Joseph Campbell explored two types of deeds that any hero or heroine might resolve along the archetypal quest. The first fulfills a material objective, the performance of some tangible and ultimately courageous act, however difficult or seemingly impossible. The second deed is less clear because it is spiritual in nature. It involves a journey along which the hero uncovers hidden mystical knowledge about human existence, often returning with a sacred message or some life-giving elixir.¹

As Campbell discovered, whether the deed at the center of a quest is physical or spiritual, the path of any hero, in any story—from humanity's earliest myths to its modern-day movie scripts—follows a common trajectory. And whether we encounter dragons or demons, sirens or

saints, an illusory city of celestial musicians or merely the mundane trials and temptations of an “ordinary” life, we are each the hero of our own stories.

Every hero’s journey is one of ultimate transformation. The story of the fool is to become wise. The story of the cynic is to break open in vulnerability and authenticity—to become real. The story of the despairing is to find hope, faith, and renewal. The story of the fearful or weak is to awaken into the nobility of one’s own true strength. These are fundamental journeys of the spirit, the narrative arc of souls. Of course, before we embark, we must respond to *the call*, a clarion invitation that is always sounding but can only be heard in the heart of great longing.

At this time in human history, there is a new calling, a powerful invitation rising from a sense of deep collective longing. It calls us toward a *shared* quest—one that will entail both practical and spiritual action. At its core, it is a journey of collective healing. To succeed, we must begin to make whole the rift between the worlds of science and spirit, to create a sacred marriage between vital, yet formerly contradictory, domains. Its fulfillment brings unity in place of division, integration rather than separation. As with all great heroic journeys, our very survival depends on it.

This book is an effort to amplify the urgency of the call and to inspire the hero/ine in all of us.

THE PRINCIPLE OF ENSŌ

Mystical wisdom arises from a direct and unmediated experience of the numinous that is both personal and universal. This experience reveals a glimpse into the great and unfathomable mystery at the center of All That Is, leaving seekers with a sense of heightened awareness—a clearer perspective of self and other, human and cosmos. When doctrine, dogma, sectarian politics, and power structures are lifted from the religious or spiritual lens, timeless principles for how to live a

healthy, harmonious, and fulfilled existence flow in. Whatever the culture, religion, or epoch, the principles that are at the core of the great Wisdom Traditions reveal perennial truths about the human condition, the nature of reality, and for some, that which is called the Divine.

Mystical theory is never simply about knowledge. It is about resonance, coherence, re-mem-bering, and fulfillment. It is about creating deeper clarity of perception. The ancient *ensō* symbol found in the Zen school of Buddhism, sometimes called the “circle of enlightenment” or the “infinity circle,” is frequently depicted in Japanese calligraphy as a perfectly imperfect open circle. The *ensō* is often used to represent *satori*. The words *satori* and its relative, *kenshō*—which translates as “seeing into one’s true nature”—are commonly translated as “enlightenment.” The sacred symbol of the *ensō* represents vast space, that which lacks nothing and yet holds nothing. It simultaneously depicts cycles of beginnings and endings and the greater infinity that contains them. It symbolizes both completion and the space of opening in renewal.



Ensō symbol

The *ensō* reveals the path of energy as it seeks transformation through substance, in order that it may return into peace more fully developed. Our lives reflect this principle.

When a part of my life energy, or *chi*, becomes arrested, unable to fulfill its natural developmental path, it fragments from the whole and lands in the unconscious. As a result, I am unaware of this split but

nevertheless carry it with me in the form of additional psychic baggage. We could say that this process is similar to computer fragmentation: when a cycle can't complete itself, the system becomes hampered by fragmented files or disintegration.

Let's say that I find myself in a difficult conversation with a colleague at midday and become irritated and defensive or anxious. For the rest of the day, I find myself thinking back on the conversation, replaying it in my mind. Each time I do this, I reexperience the irritation and anxiety I felt when the conversation first occurred so that these feelings persist, even after I've stopped thinking of my colleague. That evening, I meet a friend for dinner. If I still haven't resolved the day's experience, I may as well set an extra place at the table for my energetic baggage. Even if I don't explain how I'm feeling or why, my friend will likely feel its residual presence. And should something come up over dinner that touches further irritation inside me, I will leave carrying still more baggage or fragmentation.

The unresolved energy that I carry weighs me down and colors my experiences, preventing me from showing up fully in the present moment. This baggage or fragmentation is karmic; it is the energy of the unmet past. Because it hinders precise alignment to the present moment, it creates a distortion not only in my perspective but also in my experience of space-time itself.

In the mystical traditions, fragmentation, stagnation, and isolation are observed as areas of weakness, illness, or disease. When organs, structures, systems, or people become shut down, closed off, isolated, or unfulfilled, their internal and external ability to communicate and receive information has been stunted or lost, and the health of the organism may be at risk. Healing is the work of opening or returning connection. It is the fulfillment of the *ensō*.

When we do healing work, we safely unpack the unconscious luggage we carry. We "defrag" in an effort to bring about greater integration. Healing permits us to travel lighter and brighter, to be more fully and deeply present to the moment, as less of the past splits our

energy and attention and weighs us down. We begin to feel a sense of deeper presence, of “here-ness,” and to see and sense our world with greater clarity and precision. Like it does for Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, our world goes technicolor.

With the fulfillment of the ensō, there is a return to peace. The openness of the circle permits divine intelligence to pour in. Here, what had been the ordinary world becomes nonordinary, and previously isolated, stagnated sectors suddenly breathe open and awaken with energy and vitality. Newly flowing and interpenetrating systems exchange intelligence and dance with life.

In the chapters ahead, as we consider more mainstream and contemporary psychological, neurological, epigenetic,² and sociocultural findings related to the subject of trauma, we will return always to ancient mystical principles related to being human and to healing. In this way, we are binding the hands of science and spirit in a sacred handfasting, weaving a double helix between ancient wisdom and contemporary understanding.

DESTINY OF THE UNHEALED HERO

From a mystic’s (or Jungian’s) perspective, every experience or emotion from the past that remains unacknowledged, unprocessed, or denied is stored in the realm of the unconscious, or shadow. These experiences have not been integrated by the psyche or spirit, and so they will—indeed, they must—surface again and again in new but familiar forms. *What we think of as destiny is in fact the unintegrated past.* And the fragmented, unintegrated past appears always as a false future of repetition, a preprogrammed path along which every individual and every culture sets out until the contents of that past have been brought into the light of consciousness, reconciled and healed. This mystical wisdom reveals itself in the study of history and psychology, and undergirds philosopher George Santayana’s words, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”³

We may choose to understand these repetitions of shadow content as *karma*, a Sanskrit word originally meaning “effect” or “fate” (i.e., destiny). Or we may recognize them in light of our contemporary understanding as trauma—specifically as *retraumatization*, the unconscious act of repeating the conditions of earlier traumas upon self and others.

Everything that resides in my unconscious inevitably flows into and blends with yours and everyone else’s. All together, this forms the collective shadow, which may be visualized as a series of dark subterranean lakes, flowing deep beneath our everyday awareness. The dark water of the collective shadow becomes a way station for the energetic residue of unresolved conflicts, multigenerational suffering, and all manner of unhealed trauma. It harbors the unacknowledged hatred of one nation for another, the suppressed terror echoing within a racial group or gender, and the unexpressed outrage felt by a tribe or religious faction.

Psychic energy that is held in the shadow remains out of sight until it becomes activated by external conditions and an accumulation of energetic momentum within the social field. Once activated, the dark contents of the shadow surface like a Loch Ness monster, cresting in the form of patterns of human behavior and consequence, from recurring toxic relationship patterns to poisonous social histories. These repetitions are the silent summoning of our unhealed injuries and unexamined failures. Freud termed the tendency to repeat the painful past *Wiederholungszwang*, or “repetition compulsion,” theorizing that unconscious retraumatization is an attempt to find conscious resolution to the original trauma.⁴ Whether surfacing as histories of poverty, family violence, or addiction, or on the social scale as ethnic hatreds, war, or social collapse, repetition compulsion is an ancient undercurrent in human affairs—one that can be healed.

While our will is our own, our choices are inevitably bound and restricted by karma, by trauma, by what we conceive of as “the past”—all that we have denied, disowned, dissociated, and suppressed. The unconscious denial of any experience freezes some portion of

our available energy in shadow, thereby restricting our freedom and movement. With every denial or suppression of the past, we create our destiny, which is the repetition of suffering.

Still, as the great spiritual myths reveal, the hero discovers that by acknowledging and repairing the folly of his past, by integrating all he has been, he may become truly free—and more of what he truly *is*.

THE FUTURE CAN REWRITE THE PAST

In both philosophy and quantum physics there is a theory referred to as *retrocausality*, which posits that certain, perhaps very special, effects may in fact precede their causes. While retrocausality remains hotly debated in both fields, new support continues to emerge. In 2017, the esteemed Royal Society published a paper by physicists Matthew S. Leifer and Matthew F. Pusey titled “Is a Time Symmetric Interpretation of Quantum Theory Possible without Retrocausality?” which presents theoretical support for retrocausality.⁵

If proven, the theory of retrocausality could mean that influences from the present or future are able to act on, and thereby *change*, the past. From the mystical perspective, this is an essential principle of grace and is always true. The future indeed has the power to rewrite the past. In fact, when we integrate shadow or trauma, we’re utilizing this principle because healing past energy creates a forward ripple effect. This releases light and energy that was previously held in shadow, offering greater movement and freedom of will in the present.

The retrocausality principle is at the heart of the work I facilitate around trauma healing for both individuals and groups, whether they’re the members of a family, organization, or community of practice anywhere in the world. A deeper examination of retrocausal healing will be explored later in this book.

There is still some essence of truth in German zoologist and evolutionist Ernst Haeckel’s words, “Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.” Put very simply, the origin and developmental stages of a single

organism across its life span (ontogeny) looks a lot like the changes that occurred in its ancestors as a whole throughout time (phylogeny). We are meant to develop, to evolve, as all life develops and evolves, and along a similar trajectory—fundamentally, consciously, systemically, *mutually*. As we awaken in consciousness, we create room for the light of inspiration and innovation to fill and pour through us. This activates flow states, unimpeded currents of pure evolutionary energy. This emergent, creative, and spontaneous stream of light and information is the essence of the authentic future, that which is original and nonrepeating.

As our karmic past is cleared, as trauma is healed and integrated, the genuine future can arrive to meet us. When we greet it from a place of presence and attunement, the world catches fire. Suddenly everything changes, yet nothing is lost. Like Paul on the road to Damascus, where before we were blind, now we see. We recognize new vistas.

We tend to see our world in three dimensions, but physicists tell us there are many more. To attempt to “see” multidimensionally, imagine a hologram. A holographic image is a photographic recording of a light field, appearing visually as a 3D object. While a photograph itself is merely a 2D representation, it can be projected in such a way that it is experienced as a higher dimension (i.e., 3D). Now imagine that you are a being who resides somewhere in, say, the fifth or sixth dimension, so that you are able to see and observe your own dimension, as well as every lower plane that it incorporates—just as we can see and recognize the first through the third dimensions. From your new point of view, you’d likely have a very different perspective on time, which is the fourth dimension. Time appears quite linear to us from our vantage down in 3D, where we commonly assume the past is always behind us, and the future is always before us (and never the twain shall meet). But from a higher dimensional perspective, we might recognize how it is that effects can precede their causes, and thus, how the future can change the past.

PERCEPTION DISTORTION IS SPACE-TIME DISTORTION

When we become burdened by the stories we tell ourselves about the past, we cannot show up fully in the present; we can't bring our most essential energy into our work or relationships. Whether we move through a day replaying content from a difficult romantic exchange or a frustrating business meeting, an active percentage of who we are is occupied in the past and therefore absent in the present and not available to the here and now.

Imagine that everything you perceive and remember, intuit and feel, see and experience is a projection on a kind of internal movie screen. Your experience of the room you sit in, the book or device you're holding, the words you're reading right now, and your own bodily sensations and feelings is merely perception projected onto this inner screen. Now, imagine that when you are fully available to the present moment, your movie screen is clear and crisp, and the surround sound has perfect clarity. But when you become occupied with thoughts or feelings about the karmic past, your screen becomes wrinkled and puckered. And when traumatic experiences happen to you, this screen becomes warped, and the sound is made tinny and staticky. Now, imagine that as you attempt to watch, advertisements or someone else's movie entirely becomes superimposed over your own! Any of this would make it difficult to clearly interpret what you're sensing and experiencing.

Everything we perceive about our world becomes distorted to the degree that we are fragmented by trauma and bound by the unresolved past. Perception of self and other desynchronizes. Cultural perceptions twist and distort. Since that unresolved content *is* the past, space-time itself warps.

Mythologically, such distortions are treated as illusions. Their purpose is to test the insight and spiritual fortitude of the hero. Whether these distortions appear in ourselves or others, in our families or societies, it's important to recognize the power they possess to destabilize and further fragment.

LOCATING TRAUMA'S COSMIC ADDRESS

We might think of the human body as a hologram, nonlinear and multidimensional. All parts of a hologram contain the image of the whole, just as the cells of the body—whether skin cells, heart cells, brain cells, and so on—contain the genetic blueprint for the entire body.

The energy flowing vertically along the spinal column represents what is happening *now*, but because the body is a multidimensional space-time template, it simultaneously reveals a full energetic record of its own past. The nervous system is the body's intelligent central core, and it contains a detailed *akasha*⁶ of an individual's entire developmental history.

With healing practice, we can learn to zoom in and feel deeply into or align with any of the holographic coordinates of the energetic nervous system, in both ourselves and others. By developing this skill, we can learn to use our own nervous systems to attune in relation to that of another. This allows us to access impressions or emotional sensations relating to experiences that occurred at specific points in space and time. This subtle competency grows in clarity as we learn to connect through the receiver of our own nervous system, establishing a data connection through deeper precision. By attuning to another person in this way, always with permission, we can simply feel, within our own system, the approximate age or stage in life at which a painful experience or trauma occurred. This is its “cosmic address.”

Unhealed trauma damages our capacities for presence and embodiment and harms our ability to relate and connect with others in a healthy way. When we can host our experiences within, we can more functionally relate without. As stressful and disconcerting as our world appears, if we can host it, we can respond to it.

THE DIVINE HUMAN MATRIX

We are each a pulsing fiber optic cable alive in a matrix of light. The source of this light, whatever we call it—source energy, life's seed, the Divine—touches us from the *authentic* future. It is an evolutionary