



Blocks to inner healing

Jennie Cummings-Knight asks 'Do we really want to be free or is it too scary?'

As counsellors and therapists, we believe that healing of all kinds is possible, and especially all kinds of psychological healing. But do we look at the reasons that healing does not take place, from a personal perspective? Do we consider how we sabotage our own healing? Are we aware of those times, for example, that we hold on to anxieties or resentments?

My view is that in order to work effectively as therapists in helping others to gain release and inner healing, we need to look at our own blocked areas first, and looking at them may be easier said than done.

First, I wonder how many of us spend our days in a mad dash trying to keep up with essential tasks. Everything from keeping the home running to dealing with bills, complaints, cold calls, juggling a job with family responsibilities, walking the dog, feeding a fussy cat, remembering follow-up hospital appointments and repeat prescriptions, checking if there is petrol in the tank before we start a journey etc. This is just a brief list; you can compile your own.

Do we think that leisure activities are an optional extra? What about that picture you were going to start painting, that evening class you were going to attend, that lunch with a friend, that concert you intended to go to? Do these get put on one side more often than not? How much time do we give to genuine, unrushed reflection about what really matters to us? How often do we check whether life has more daily 'pluses' than 'negatives'?

Some of you might be saying: 'But I am a therapist - of course I think about my own needs.' I am sure that many of us do, but what about, for example, therapists who work full time in frantic settings and who may be so tired that they spend their

weekends largely sleeping? When one feels overwhelmed, it is easy to put off dealing with warning signs of our inner health being neglected.

Suppose that you have a problem in your house with your plumbing. Unless you are a plumber yourself, you will have to eventually get someone in to find out exactly what is wrong. Then you ask for an estimate of costs. Finally, you will have to arrange for the work to be done, be at home while it is being done, and then come up with the money to pay the plumber. It can be quite a lengthy process.

So what are the signs that a blockage is building up? How would you know that your body or your mind or both, are giving you early warning signs? Perhaps the obvious answer is to be 'mindful' enough to notice where we are hurting - either physically, emotionally, or both.

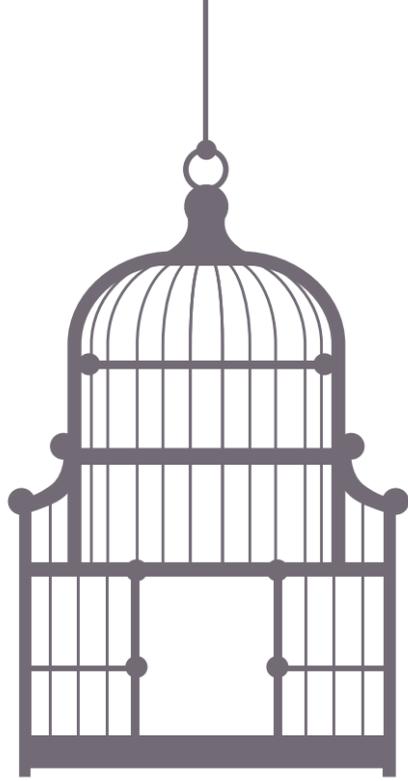
In the Bible, the prophet Isaiah writes movingly: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace

was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.'¹ I have used the King James version because it is what I memorised as a child, but some people might prefer a more modern version that uses the word 'punishment' rather than chastisement.

The Hebrew word for peace, 'Shalom',² refers to a state of 'wholeness' or completion - so a lack of peace could imply that something is missing. If you consider the simple phenomenon of a bruise on your arm for example, as it heals you can see a return in the condition of your skin, to a state of 'wholeness'.

Matthew Henry³ explains the passage from Isaiah by saying that God created the world and all that is in it, and gave mankind free will. Mankind chose to disobey a direct command given from God in the Garden of Eden, thus bringing death into the world, and passing on the 'taint' of sin and suffering to each generation following. Because God loves His creation, He sent His only son, Jesus Christ, to take the sins of the world upon Himself and 'wipe out' the debt that

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that needs to be set up at work, to look at a chronic problem which you know, in your heart of hearts, is not going away by itself?

Other questions to examine might be: are my anxieties realistic or irrational? What can I do to relieve them? Is my work/life balance healthy and, if not, what am I going to do about it? Am I more concerned about saving money for retirement than having a healthy lifestyle now? What assumptions am I making about the possible length of my life?

I wonder how we can allow more healing into our lives. How can we divert those healing streams, that sometimes seem to be not quite in our neck of the woods, directly into our homes and lives?

mankind had incurred in the form of judgment for sin. The prophet Isaiah was looking forward in time to the promised 'Suffering Servant' who would heal the breach between God and man (see also: Romans 5: 1, Ephesians 2: 14, 15, 17). The Christian Church believes that these words refer to Christ's death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection; it teaches that healing is available to us through that sacrifice. So how does this relate to counselling and therapy? The way that I understand the verse from Isaiah, from a Christian perspective, is that healing is available to me, through the healing of the breach between mankind and God. But I can only receive this healing into myself if I can let it seep into my inner psyche. In short, if I can make myself open to healing, I will receive it.

If I were not of a Christian persuasion, I might still believe that healing is available to me from a power greater than myself, however I might define it. I might also somehow believe that being an effective therapist utilises the learning I have received about my own wounds, and even that being a 'wounded healer' (a term also used initially by Carl Jung⁴) is essential for helping others (see also Gaist⁵).

But how is it that so often I do not receive the inner healing that I feel I need? How am I blocking the release of those healing streams? One suggestion is that I might be defining myself by an inner

resentment. Something might have happened to me as a child, for example, where I felt slighted and wounded, and I might have made myself feel better at the time by saying that it was the other person's fault. Then I would have protected myself further by making mental notes to avoid other people who reminded me of the first one who had upset me. Over time, I would have erected a cage of protection around myself from the perceived 'toxic' people.

Perhaps I learned from an early age not to confront others whom I found difficult, but to avoid them. Or perhaps I did try to confront them and ended up feeling even worse off than before. The end result as an adult might be that I don't trust anyone much - but I might have learned to wear a mask that I put on in front of others. If others ask how I am, I answer brightly, 'I am fine!' I might let my guard down with a few trusted people, and look outwardly as if everything really is fine, but inwardly I might have a nagging lower back pain, a delicate stomach, or have days when I feel like shutting out the world and staying hidden under the duvet.

In my work environment, I might find it difficult to confront others because there is a 'culture' of any complaints being seen as displaying a 'negative attitude'. I might be over-anxious about my financial security and cling onto my job, regardless of what it might be doing to my health.

Another possibility is that I might have an inner prejudice that I have not really examined. This prejudice could shut me down from communicating with certain people who remind me of others I have known who proved to be unreliable, or who I was told were unreliable when I was a child. I might have inner beliefs relating to self-worth that I gained as a child that I have not re-examined as an adult. To give a personal example, I was taught as a child that we are not on earth to enjoy ourselves but to spread the good news of the gospel of Christ to others. I was taught that it was a sin to waste food or to be overweight, as 'there are so many starving people in the world'. While I have not thrown out these beliefs entirely, I have certainly modified them considerably.

I now believe that it is better to cultivate a generous attitude to money, food, leisure time, and the faults of others - not to mention my own faults (that is still a work in progress!). I believe that the truth can be found in many different ways, and that God reveals Himself (or Herself) to people in the best way for them personally to understand the revelation of something divine. I believe God offers healing to those who are able to accept it and who are able to allow in something new that, at the start, might feel alien and strange but that might challenge existing thought patterns and behaviours.

How can healing begin?

I think that the first step is to 'be open to change'. This sounds so easy, and as therapists we sometimes rather glibly trot out this sort of line on our websites and perhaps in our contracts with clients. But the fact is that it is actually incredibly difficult to be open to change. Human beings often feel safest when they are surrounded by rules and regulations put in place by others. We do not always consider whether these rules can be trusted - sometimes it just takes the pressure off that sense of responsibility to put oneself inside a structure of some sort. It might be family influences, peer influences, work influences, politics, church, or indeed any kind of group where, at one time, we have felt the ease of familiarity. But over time, a structure can become a prison, and we need to keep checking whether the structures we live with are overall healthy or toxic for us as individuals.

Once open to change, the challenge is to take some steps to make things different. Some of us like taking risks and some of us are terrified by the prospect. But whether we are comfortable with risk taking or not, if we do not adapt to our changing environment, we will not survive.

We can make decisions as human beings that can improve our lives in the long term, if we choose to do so.

The difficulty sometimes is feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task. But how can we begin to make practical changes for the benefit of ourselves and our loved ones? The simplest things, such as diet and exercise, are often the most difficult to change. It is a fact that, as we age, our metabolism changes, and what we could eat when we were younger with no apparent effect on the body now definitely does have an effect. Generally speaking, we need fewer calories and might need to pay attention to particular deficits or areas of excess. But, emotionally, eating is a tricky business. We become accustomed to eating certain things and certain amounts, and we feel unsafe when we make changes. Likewise, with exercise - we all know that in theory it's a good thing but in practice other commitments might make it difficult to make it part of the daily routine.

Health at its most basic level depends on a good interaction between body, mind and spirit (however you define these words). Just as a good plumber will check your heating and water systems thoroughly for blockages, we as individuals need to give ourselves regular thorough checks for internal blockages to healing.

On an emotional level, is there a letter that needs to be written, perhaps to a difficult relative? Is there a phone call that needs to be made? Is there a meeting

Biography

Jennie Cummings-Knight works privately as a counsellor, writer, psychotherapist and lecturer in Cromer, Norfolk. Her current research interests include dementia, death anxiety and male identity issues. She welcomes comments and feedback.



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