Soul Injury
Liberating Unmourned Loss & Unforgiven Guilt

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SOUL INJURY:
An Overlooked, Unassessed Wound

• Personal Historical Background and Source of Information
• “More than just PTSD”
• Dying people know things the rest of us don’t!
• Awaken to “I matter!” (the “gift”)
• Meeting Maker: → Unvarnished Truth
  Unburdening of the Soul
• A Privileged witness... “window of perspective”
SOUL INJURY:  
An Overlooked, Unassessed Wound  

- Trauma morphs at the end of life (weakening of conscious mind → unbidden memories → agitation)  
- Thousands of Hospice & PTSD professionals  
- Handful of professionals specializing in BOTH  
- Confluence of these two patient populations (Dying + Trauma) is yielding lessons not previously appreciated – lessons for the world.

Hospice: A Laboratory of SOUL Truth  

A Bird’s-eye View...  
Witnessing trauma vs.  
Causing Trauma  
Soul Injury
Soul Restoration Process: Liberating Pain & Shame

Began with opening to the pain/shame he had been fleeing.
Shame separated him from his sense of self and inner goodness
Telling his story of shame to a receptive “witness” → RE-OWN the lost part of self
Forgiving self → RE-HOME self (exile changed into safety)
Smile of Relief → RE-VITALIZE
Dying Healed (next day)

Few Can Relate to “Slitting Throats”

• Many can relate to “Traumatic Soul Injury”
  (about 50% of population – probably more: abuse, crime, natural disasters, car accidents, sexual assault, domestic violence, etc.)
SOUL INJURY: A Spectrum of Wounds

Different Routes and Rates
Similar end-points: Separated from self

Insidious Soul Injury
Webster’s Dictionary: 3 Definitions of “Insidious”

• Developing so gradually as to be well established before becoming apparent
• Harmful but enticing
• Awaiting a chance to entrap
• Caused by a LOVING father  ➔ Insidious Soul Injury
• MY decision caused damage (ashamed of the part of myself feeling pain, numbing, dead inside). Loss of Personhood, grew over time
• My unfreezing (age 35) came when I realized that my FEAR of pain was worse than feeling the pain
• All of us have ACQUIRED insidious soul injuries.

What Keeps SOUL INJURIES Embodied?

• Unmourned Loss
  [includes failure, disappointment (divorce, job, friendship, etc.)]
• Unforgiven Guilt/Shame
  “Why didn’t I learn how to do this years ago?”

Impetus for launching Opus Peace Non-Profit Organization started by six VA Hospice staff
We have been the “Witness Bearers” for lessons about attaining peace from those who went to war...
“Bearing Witness” to SOUL INJURY

• Do we know how to “bear witness” to emotional pain?
• Are we prepared to “bear witness” with each other?
• Are we prepared “bear witness” to our own selves?
• Does our fear of emotional pain interfere with the “witnessing” process?
• How could an understanding of SOUL INJURY help dissipate that fear?

Important questions to ask...

What is “Soul”?

“The vital or essential part.”

(-Webster's Dictionary)

The essence of our being...
beyond body...
beyond mind...

Vitality: sense of self, “beingness”
What is “Soul”?

Can’t be defined

Vernacular Inferences:
Soul mate, Soul food
“Deep in my soul”
“Lost my soul”

*Opus Peace* has no agenda about “soul,”
just agenda about SOUL INJURY

Soul Injury (Sōl Ĭn’-juh-rē) *noun*

1. An aching wound perpetuated by
   unmourned loss and unforgiven
   guilt/shame that is often manifested as a
   sense of emptiness, loss of meaning, or a
   sense that a part of self is missing
2. A penetrating wound that separates one
   from their own sense of self
3. A long-lasting response to a person or
   situation that causes one to feel personally
   defective, inadequate, or unworthy
What are the Symptoms of SOUL INJURY?

- Fractured Self-Image
- Feeling damaged
- Anger
- Loss of self-confidence
- Loss of Vitality
- Shrinking sense of inner goodness/beauty

What are the Symptoms of SOUL INJURY?

Often includes:

- A vague *emptiness* or a profound *aching* and feeling of *meaninglessness*
- A sense of *betrayal* by parents, spouse, friend, colleague, themselves, an organization, an institution, society, God, their religion, etc.
- DEFINING ourselves by the SOUL INJURY (impacting roles, relationships, etc.)
Why Should We Be Addressing Soul Injury?

- The approach to SOUL INJURY is different than traditional PTSD or chronic stress interventions
- The approach includes learning how to grieve losses/failures/disappointments → releases the loss
- Learning how to forgive self and others → releases shame
- These are not routinely taught in PTSD programs, nor in healthcare curricula in general
- SOUL INJURY interventions do not replace PTSD therapy
- Addressing and responding to SOUL INJURY fills a gap, enhances treatment/outcomes

Why SOUL INJURY Rather than “Moral Injury”?

- VA and DoD literature speaks about “Moral Injury:” a violation of deepest-held beliefs that create moral conflict or confusion.
- Push-back due to judgmental implications
- “Moral Injury” is applied almost exclusively with Veterans (ex: Children)
- Opus Peace supports “moral injury;” SOUL INJURY is simply a broader term extrapolated to all of us (so we don’t waste what Veterans learned)

SOUL INJURY also has its problems: Implies the soul is broken (as does Soul Repair, Soul Restoration, developing “resiliency”, etc.)
The Value of the Term SOUL INJURY

SOCOM (Special Operations Command: Tampa) May 21 2014

MILESTONES
28 Feb. 99: Depart military service knowing something is wrong.
1 March 99 to 21 May 2014: Searching for answers, going to therapy, treatment, retreats, introspection – trying to f/out why I feel so bad, so sad.
21 May 2014 13:45: Light goes on: I have a Soul Injury. Thank you Deborah, Thank you! The reason to start the conversation!

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Ignore Me...
No longer
What 10,000 Dying Veterans Have Taught Us...

Lesson #1: As a culture, we are categorically afraid of emotional pain.
(Not taught how to lose, fail, grieve; Encouraged to flee and numb)

Ever take a class on how to be a loser? (Page 1)
- Never have to say “good‐bye”
- “You don’t have to learn to let go”
- “You can have it all” mentality
- Society’s fear of emotional pain perpetuates SOUL INJURIES

Does Everyone with PTSD also have a SOUL INJURY?

Caught on Camera
"I can do this."

Connecting with part of herself holding painful memories (RE-OWN).

Telling her amygdala that she is safe (RE-HOME).

Neurons that fire together wire together!

Replace trusting fear with trusting self again.

Connected with self vs. anxious energy

Resist urge to help her leave!

(But don’t overwhelm)

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3-Step Self-Grounding Technique
(Use when anxious, emotionally pained, etc.)

• Anchor the Heart
• Breathe
• Feel (RE-OWN)
• Self-compassion & Safety (RE-HOME)
• Anchoring Others: (Hospice) + Back
• Compassion & Safety & Strength
• (Don’t pat or rub)
PTSD Research

Somatic (Body) Therapies:
Yoga, massage, tapping, neurofeedback, EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization Re-processing), etc.

Does Everyone with PTSD Also Have a SOUL INJURY?

No
Does Everyone with a Soul Injury also have PTSD?

No

PTSD & SOUL INJURY

• Related (with each factor increasing the risk for acquiring the other), but they are NOT mutually dependent.
• SOUL INJURY: It depends on whether or not you get separated from your own sense of self by feeling defective, inadequate, or unworthy.
• SOUL INJURY is not worse than PTSD; it is different. PTSD impacts the brain; SOUL INJURY impacts our sense of being.
Treatment for SOUL INJURY vs. PTSD?

PTSD: Manage symptoms 
(otherwise can’t address the 
SOUL INJURY)

SOUL INJURY: Open up to the 
symptom, connect with the 
part of self generating the 
symptom → opens healing.

PTSD: Manage triggers

SOUL INJURY: Disarm the heart 
through self-compassion, 
love, grief, and forgiveness.

SOUL INJURY: 
Origins & Propagation

Lessons about Peace from 
Those Who Went to War
SOUL INJURY:
Traumatic Origins & Propagation

SOUL INJURY Propagation:
Barriers that Interfere with Healing

STOICISM:
A Form of Denial
Heritage
Military Necessity
Soul Injury Propagation: Stoicisim

“Showing indifference to joy, grief, pleasure, pain.”

/Webster's Dictionary/

Grit AND Grace

What 10,000 Dying Veterans Have Taught Us...

Lesson #2: Stoicism is necessary in some ways and a hindrance in other ways.

(It’s important to be able to make the distinction!)
Scattered Pieces of Self
Come into the world with unfulfilled wholeness
(ex: Baby – no distortions/fears about who it is/isn’t)
Move from Unconscious wholeness to Conscious wholeness

What Part of Self
Do You Identify with?
Answer → Determines Separation from Sense of Self
Bullied as a kid? Called Names?
Soul Injury
Me?

Me?
Soul Restoration

Soul restoration includes learning how to RE-OWN, RE-HOME, and RE-VITALIZE scattered pieces of self by cultivating personal intimacy with the part of self carrying our emotional pain.

“Intimacy” within own Self

We will keep looking for it outside ourselves! We will keep looking for short cuts!
“Intimacy” within own Self

Connecting with the part of self generating the pain, paradoxically, “restoreths the soul” not numbing & disconnection.

The Hero’s Journey...Within

Poet: Derek Walcott

The time will come when, with elation you will greet yourself arriving at your own door, in your own mirror and each will smile at the other’s PERSONAL intimacy... Especially when you can greet the part of self carrying your emotional pain.

So why aren’t we using grieving and forgiveness to restore our wounded souls?

Fear gets in the way...
Unmourned Loss Sabotages our Bodies, Minds, and Spirits!

Unmourned loss gets stored in our bodies, minds, and spirits.

Box up your pain → your vitality, your personhood, your passion get boxed up as well.
Recipe for Losing Self (SOUL INJURY)
Soul Injuries are Fatal...

if they deaden your sense of Being.

Those Who Grieve Well, Heal Well

Because the grief doesn’t have to be stored. Grief is the natural, normal expression of loss, disappointment, failure. Grieving releases emotional pain.
Those Who Grieve Well, Heal Well

Grieving is CREATIVE: Let go of what was and open up to what is.
Grieving is NOT a destructive process.
UNMOURNED Grief is a destructive process.

Failure to grieve leaves the part of self carrying the pain of loss/failure HOMELESS.
Don’t be afraid of that part of yourself.
Clinicians and Families: Stop being afraid.
We need to learn how to develop a different relationship with the part of self carrying our pain.

Replace:
“Go away. I don’t like you. I’m afraid of you.”
with
“Tell me how you are hurting.
I will listen.”

Numbing Out Your PAIN Means...
You are NOT a safe place for the part of yourself carrying your pain!

What’s your favorite numbing agent?
How Would the World Be Different if We Weren’t Afraid of our Pain?

How would my world be different if I wasn’t afraid of MY emotional pain?
How would our CHILDREN’S world be different if we taught them to not be afraid of their emotional pain?

If We Were Not Afraid...

We would have less of a relationship with our numbing agents, and more of a relationship with our soul!
When You’re Living Life Passionately...

You stop NUMBING the pain and instead let yourself feel it.
You stop being afraid of your pain.
You tell your ego to stop covering your pain up with anger, fear, and shame.
You talk to the part of yourself carrying the pain.
You comfort that part of yourself (not with numbing agents!)
You tell a TRUSTED other about your pain.

The purpose of connecting with your grief is to rescue the part of self that is carrying it!

(Your Courage is in the exiled self)
SOUL INJURY Origins & Propagation:
We Don't Know How to Re-Own & Re-Home
Guilt/Shame/Blame

Almost always surrounds PTSD and SOUL INJURY
Yet...

Seeking and Finding Forgiveness:
A Journey into the Wilderness of the Soul

He Did Not Waste His Suffering!
The difference between “ordinary” people and “heroes” is that heroes don’t waste their suffering.

What 10,000 Dying Veterans Have Taught Us...

Lesson #4: Learning the process and work of forgiveness is redemption.

(Not learning it is a recipe for disconnection from the soul which can lead to bitterness.)
What Responsibility Do Friends, Family, Caregivers, and Public Have in Healing the SOUL INJURY in our Midst?

Learning from our Veterans...

Paul Tschudi
Validating Emotional Pain: An Act of Compassion

- Taking time to “lick your wounds” or “kiss the boo-boo” BEFORE you “get on with it.”
- Validation is an act of self-compassion to acknowledge the loss, feel the emotions and sensations.
- It counters DENIAL. (Don’t Even kNow I Am Lying.)
- Denial is a numbing agent.
- “Licking your wounds” allows you to feel the pain so the part of self feeling it doesn’t have to be exiled into unconsciousness → numbing and/or angry outbursts.

What 10,000 Dying Veterans Have Taught Us about Compassion for Self & Others

Lesson #6: Cultivate Qualities that Redeem your Personhood: Honesty, Courage, and Humility.
Why Honesty, Courage, Humility?

Honesty: “Unvarnished” Truth
(“Now, while I’m dying, is no time for me to be lying to myself.”)
Courage: No one can die for you. Even with loving, supportive family all around you, you have to take the leap yourself.
Humility: Because people haven’t died before, they don’t know how to do it, they:
   Ask for help, receive help, & listen.

Develop these qualities and you won’t be left asking, “Why did I have to be dying to learn how to do this!”

(Steve Job’s “Wow”!)
Just before you die, there’s often an experience of freedom from fear and feeling safe and trusting your personhood.
Just because death isn’t easy or pretty, does not mean it doesn’t have something to teach us.
Soul Restoration

Paul Tschudi

Paul let the Light in...

Soul Injury Film

Event Format
- Locally-assembled panel to provide commentary and answer audience questions
- 2 CEs for Nurses, Social Workers, Clergy, Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors, Addiction Professionals, Marriage & Family Therapy, Mental Health Counseling, Death Education and Counseling, Nursing Home Administrators, Psychologists

Materials include:
- Panel Discussion Manual
- Marketing & Strategizing Guidelines
- “Ask Me about Soul Injury” buttons
- Congressional “Soul Injury Awareness Month” National Proclamation
- Monthly Insight Activities

Cost: $25 for the on-demand webcast and $50 (plus $9 for shipping and handling) for the DVD.

To register:
- Go to https://hospicefoundation.org/HFA-Products/Soul-Injury
Call to Action to Let the Light In:
Individual or as a Team, Group, Family

Use this video as a PLATFORM for YOUR cause, contextualizing it to your population.
Each month participate in a MONTHLY insight activity:
• Simple
• Straightforward
• Do-able
• Liberating

Call to Action:
Individual or as a Team, Group, Family

• Contemplating & Discussing: “How would the world be different if we weren’t afraid of our emotional pain?”
• Recognizing our favorite “numbing agents”
• Validating suffering of others/self (compassion)
• Learning the 3-step “Anchoring Heart Technique”
• Wearing an “Ask me about SOUL INJURY button” to promote dialogue
• Reflecting upon the Opus Peace prayer...
Opus Peace Prayer

Cultivate in me the willingness to RE-OWN, RE-HOME, and RE-VITALIZE scattered pieces of myself so wholeness can be restored.
Grow in me the honesty, courage, and humility to release my fear of who I am and who I am not.
Fuel me with your grace.

Amen

Proclamation to Congress

January: National Soul Injury Awareness Month

• WHEREAS, each year millions of lives are affected by traumatic or insidious injuries that accompany the aftermath of war, violence, abuse, neglect, betrayal, or serious illness; and

• WHEREAS, the mental and emotional distress that accompany these injuries often goes unrecognized, untreated, and misunderstood, creating a gaping hole in our society that is filled with Unmourned Loss and Unforgiven Guilt/Shame; and
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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

-Margaret Mead

Anthropologist
Opus Peace Vision:

to start a movement that responds to SOUL INJURY

We Need Your Help!

• Start a Healing Community using “The Hero Within” or with veterans “Peace at Last” books
• Take the “Soul Injury Leadership Training” at our Institute
• Become an Opus Peace ambassador
• Utilize websites: www.OpusPeace.org or www.soulinjury.org

Music Credits

Karen Taylor-Good:

• I Need a Witness
• Let the Light In

www.karentaylorgood.com  www.stowegood.com

Laura Pole:

• Dear Brother
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