

Soul Retrieval:

Returning Home After Trauma

By Mara Bishop, MS, ThM, CSC

When pain is too intense, your instincts often protect you. Physiologically, one of the reactions is losing consciousness when pain is intolerable; another is shock, when all the body's resources are focused on keeping vital organs functioning. This is survival mode.

Energetic instincts react in much the same way, helping you survive traumatic events on a spiritual level. When a situation is too physically or emotionally painful to withstand, a part of us tends to leave the body. The idea that a person's psyche can fragment during times of extreme stress is ancient and widespread. In modern psychology it's called "dissociation." In shamanism it's called "soul loss." Soul loss is a self-protective response to a threatening event, such as accident, abuse, loss of a loved one, divorce, surgery, natural disaster, or war. It's excruciating to be fully inside the body and processing the pain of times like these, so part of our spiritual essence moves away to avoid experiencing the full impact of the trauma. The expression that someone is "beside himself with grief" describes this process.

The instinct is normal, and self-protective; however, problems occur when the part of the essence that separated to shield does not return fully to one's larger being when the crisis is over. In chronic situations, like abusive relationships or war, the crisis is ongoing, so it may not feel safe to return "home" to one's body for extended periods. When this happens a variety of symptoms may occur. Some people notice a discernable difference after a particular event or period in their lives, saying for example, "I've never been the same after my divorce." or "I'm not myself since the surgery." For others, the effects of soul loss build up until they reach a trauma threshold and realize something is wrong.

Depression is more common after soul loss, as a person is literally dispirited, missing a part of him- or herself. This can lead to issues with addiction, looking to outside substances or activities to fill a sense of emptiness and loss; but this does not satisfy the craving, since what is missing is a part of one's spiritual essence. Addictions can also cause soul loss, as they severely tax one's body and leave it vulnerable to more trauma. Other people report physical symptoms like autoimmune issues. Some report memory loss. Anxiety is common.

ADDRESSING SOUL LOSS: SOUL RETRIEVAL

Shamanic cultures address soul loss through a process called soul retrieval. Shamanic practitioners enter into an altered state where they can

perceive what's happening on the energetic level. They seek out the disconnected parts of a client's essence and bring them home. With the returning parts often comes a sense of wholeness, and even specific qualities that were lost or muted since the time when the trauma occurred. As with all shamanic work, the practitioner works closely with spiritual help. Soul retrieval focuses on the return of the client's natural resources, the gifts they came into the world with, not on having to relive or review past traumas. A soul retrieval helps to reunite a person with parts of themselves that they may have been disconnected from since childhood, allowing a fullness and a reclaiming of power that often translates into a new perspective on their current life, a fuller realization of innate gifts, and better relationships with others.

RESULTS

One woman came to see me after a series of significant traumatic events, including addictions, depression, and rape. She said, "I came away feeling connected. Something had been revealed to me that had eluded me, and I was really able to let go of some old wounds. I understood something about myself that enabled me to move on." Another client who had experienced significant trauma in early adulthood, including loss of loved ones, had this reaction: "soul retrieval was a deeply moving experience for me... it brought me to a place of peace, joy, and hope that I have not been to for a very long time." "Since the soul retrieval everything has felt really, really positive," shared another client "I'm more relaxed and energized too. I've been relaxed which is unusual for me. I've felt more grateful."

A woman who did many of her sessions remotely felt that soul retrieval had "helped much more than years of talk therapy." This is not an uncommon response, as soul retrieval begins to address the energetic imbalances that result from trauma, which is often hard to do on a purely cognitive level.

The responses people have are quite varied, from pronounced and profound to fairly subtle. Although many people resonate immediately with the description of soul loss, an experienced practitioner needs to do an assessment to determine if soul retrieval is indicated and if there is any preliminary work that would be beneficial in the client's healing process. This is deep, intimate work; but it's not a magic bullet. Much of the benefit is dependent on a person's willingness to do the personal work necessary following the sessions to integrate and make changes in their own lives. hkh



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