

The Role of Spirituality in Trauma Wounding and The Healing of EMDR Therapy

25th EMDRIA Conference
Stephen Dansiger, PsyD, LMFT

© 2020 StartAgain

1

Dr. Stephen Dansiger

- PsyD, Clinical Psychology
- Licensed MFT in California
- Buddhist Practitioner over 30 years
- Including One Year at a Zen Buddhist monastery
- Teaches Dharma classes locally and internationally
- Fifteen-year career as social justice/diversity/inclusion educator and facilitator
- Presenter 2016/18/19 EMDRIA Conferences
- Creator/Founder of the MET(T)A Protocol (Mindfulness and EMDR Treatment Template for Agencies)
- EMDRIA Approved Consultant/Certified Therapist
- Senior Faculty, Institute for Creative Mindfulness
- Author, *Clinical Dharma*; Coauthor, *EMDR Therapy and Mindfulness for Trauma-Focused Care*; Author, *Mindfulness for Anger Management: Transformative Skills for Overcoming Anger and Managing Powerful Emotions*
- Coauthor, *Trauma and the 12 Steps Meditation Reader and Step Workbook* (Fall, 2020); Coauthor, *Healing Addiction with EMDR Therapy: A Trauma-Focused Guide* (Summer, 2021)
- Head of Health & Wellness Innovation & Partnerships, DropLabs
- Master of Health Care Innovation (MCHI), University of Pennsylvania, 3rd Cohort

© 2020 StartAgain

2

ASAM Disclosure of Relevant Financial Relationships

NAME	COMMERCIAL INTERESTS	RELEVANT FINANCIAL RELATIONSHIPS	ROLE IN THESE RELATIONSHIPS
Stephen Dansiger, PsyD, LMFT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owner and Founder of StartAgain • Training clinicians in EMDR therapy and training treatment centers in MET(T)A Protocol and Trauma-Focused Care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts with treatment centers to train staff, bolster clinical processes, and provide technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Contractor • Trainer • Private Practice Clinician • Consultant

© 2020 StartAgain

3

Objectives

- Discover, through an overview of the literature, the role of spirituality and spiritual wounds in the etiology of complex PTSD, PTSD, and addiction.
- Apply at least 3 interventions in Phase 1 and 2 of EMDR therapy to assess for and begin treatment of spiritual wounds caused by trauma.

© 2020 StartAgain

4

Objectives

- Investigate the posited spiritual elements of the eight-phase protocol in order to improve treatment planning and support for clients regarding spiritual healing that occurs during treatment.
- Analyze case examples of clients with direct and indirect spiritual wounding histories, clients who report during reprocessing using spiritual terminology, and clients who report spiritual healing as a result of the eight-phase standard protocol.

© 2020 StartAgain

5

Trauma Disrupts the Spiritual Connection

- Trauma can fracture survivors' life roles, core values and beliefs (Ai & Park, 2005).
- Trauma can cause survivors to lose their spiritual connection if they have one and can serve as proof for survivors in justifying why they do not have one.
- The loss of a spiritual connection or the lack of one can trigger a survivor to use maladaptive forms of coping, such as using substances, in an attempt to fill the void of what spirituality provides.

© 2020 StartAgain

6

The Loss of Spirituality Can Lead to Pathology

- The loss of spirituality is a possible creator of pathology and a hindrance to recovery (Walker, Reid, O'Neill & Brown, 2007).
- There are many seemingly intractable cases of personality disorders, substance use disorders and anxiety disorders that are directly correlated to trauma, and feature a loss of faith or lack of faith as part of the dilemma (Grossman, Sorsoli & Kia-Keating, 2006).
- These spiritual losses are often at the heart of what makes these cases so difficult to treat (van der Kolk et al., 2005).

© 2020 StartAgain

7

Loss of Faith Resulting from Trauma

- An important definition of trauma as it relates to spirituality is provided by van der Kolk (1987), stating specifically “the essence of psychological trauma is the loss of faith that there is order and continuity in life” (p. 31).
- He goes on to say that as a result of this loss of faith, the individual loses the ability to find a safe place, whether internal or external, in order to feel and process difficult and frightening emotions.

© 2020 StartAgain

8

Loss of Faith Resulting from the Trauma of Institutionalized Oppression

- Social injustices such as racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and ableism can cause spiritual wounding and deep feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.
- Exposure to ongoing institutionalized discrimination creates deep wounding and a loss of faith in spirituality and in the goodness of people.
- Some systems of religion or spirituality have created and/or promoted racist, sexist, homophobic, and other ideas that create a double bind for individuals while also entrenching systems of oppression (i.e., slavery, Jim Crow, white supremacy).

© 2020 StartAgain

9

Spiritual Wounds and Complex PTSD

- Some of the proposed characteristics of complex PTSD such as “alterations in systems of meaning” including a “loss of sustaining faith” and a “sense of hopelessness and despair” (Herman, 1992, p. 121) reflect spiritual wounds.

© 2020 StartAgain

10

Spiritual Struggle and PTSD

- “Spiritual struggle consists of maladaptive religious cognitions about the cause of, responsibility for, and future implications of stressful events” (p. 444).
- Spiritual struggle is a potential mechanism in the development and maintenance of PTSD symptoms.
- Spiritual cognitions can play a role in the etiology of PTSD because they are responsible for creating a system of meaning, which informs coping responses, and because they make sense of existential meaning which trauma can challenge.

Wortmann, Park, & Edmondson, 2011

© 2020 StartAgain

11

Spiritual Struggle and PTSD

- Wortmann, Park and Edmondson (2011) found that trauma exposure results in PTSD symptoms in part through the negative cognitions of spiritual struggle.
- Considering that negative cognitions after trauma exposure are associated with the development and maintenance of PTSD, negative religious/spiritual cognitions may be predictive as well.

Wortmann, Park, & Edmondson, 2011

© 2020 StartAgain

12

The Link Between Spiritual Struggle and PTSD

- Studies have demonstrated that spiritual struggle is linked to PTSD (Wortmann, Park, & Edmondson, 2011).
- “Preliminary evidence has suggested that:
 - Spiritual struggle is associated with more severe symptoms of PTSD,
 - Unresolved spiritual struggle predicts future posttraumatic symptoms (Harris et al., 2012; Koenig, Pargament, & Nielsen, 1998),
 - Interventions designed to address spiritual struggle also reduce symptoms of PTSD (Harris et al., 2011)” (Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 171).

© 2020 StartAgain

13

The Need for Meaning and Purpose

- As human beings, we seek meaning and purpose.
- After experiencing trauma, survivors often seek a new sense of meaning and purpose (Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Nasello, & Koenig, 2007).
- Spiritual wounds, as a result of trauma, are an assault on the innate search for meaning and purpose.
- Complex PTSD, PTSD, and addiction can develop as a result of the lack of meaning and purpose resulting from trauma.

© 2020 StartAgain

14

The Spiritual Component in Trauma

- McBride (1998) describes how traumatic events end up providing “wounds to the soul” and he frames the crisis born of trauma as being spiritual in nature.
- Masterson (1988), in his description of the concept of abandonment depression, offers another context for the spiritual component in trauma, as the abandonment for many is experienced as an abandonment by any God or higher power that the traumatized person once believed in.

© 2020 StartAgain

15

The Spiritual Component in Trauma

- Brende and McDonald (1989) point out that people who feel betrayed or abandoned by a higher power or even their own higher self, will be unable to conduct a spiritual life under those circumstances. Without that spiritual connection, portions of complex trauma will possibly remain unhealed despite any number of interventions.

© 2020 StartAgain

16

Spiritual Wounds at the Root of Addiction

- “One consequence of spiritual deprivation is addiction” (Maté, 2010, p. 83).
- “At the core of all addictions there lies a spiritual void” (Maté, 2010, p. 83).
- Some theorists view addiction as a spiritual illness resulting from a spiritual void or search for connectedness (Holtzhausen, 2017).
- Spiritual wounds can result in the search for drugs to make up for the connectedness, meaning, and hope that comes from spirituality.

© 2020 StartAgain

17

Spiritual Wounds at the Root of Addiction

- “Substance use disorders can be manifestations of a disorder of the human spirit” (Doweiko, 1999, p. 34).
- In 1961, Carl Jung wrote, in a letter to Bill Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous: The craving for alcohol is “the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God” (AA Grapevine, 1963, p. 31).

© 2020 StartAgain

18

Spiritual Wounds at the Root of Addiction

- Addiction can take root in the void of spiritual connection that would otherwise provide meaning, purpose, and a sense of self.
- “Addiction floods in where self-knowledge—and therefore divine knowledge—are missing. To fill the unendurable void, we become attached to things of the world that cannot possibly compensate us for the loss of who we are” (Maté, 2010, p. 413).

© 2020 StartAgain

19

Spiritual Wounds at the Root of Addiction

- “In a state of spiritual poverty, we will be seduced by whatever it is that can make us insensate to our dread. That, ultimately, is the origin of the addiction process, since the very essence of that process is the drive to take in from the outside that which properly arises from within.”

Maté, 2010, p. 414

© 2020 StartAgain

20

Buddhist Conception of Addiction

- The symptoms and causes of addiction are craving, clinging, aversion, and unhealthy attachment.
- To treat addiction, one must turn toward the causes and conditions that create suffering and heal them.

© 2020 StartAgain

21

Buddhist Conception of Addiction

- The prescription for addiction is the Eightfold Path which suggests building wisdom in order to set skillful intentions, living ethically in speech, action and livelihood, and making the effort to develop mindfulness and concentration through meditation practice.
- Often, people who are spiritually wounded cannot access the Eightfold Path readily.

© 2020 StartAgain

22

Buddhism and the 12 Steps of AA

- From the Akron Pamphlet, *Spiritual Milestones in Alcoholics Anonymous*, edited by Dr. Bob, co-founder of AA:
- “Consider the eight-part program laid down in Buddhism: Right view, right aim, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindedness and right contemplation. The Buddhist philosophy, as exemplified by these eight points, could be literally adopted by AA as a substitute for or addition to the Twelve Steps. Generosity, universal love and welfare of others rather than considerations of self are basic to Buddhism.”

© 2020 StartAgain

23

Possible Spiritual Assessment Interventions to Apply in Phase 1 and 2 of EMDR Therapy

- Assess in Phase 1 and 2 for the client’s view of the importance (or lack thereof) of spirituality in their trauma wounding story, and also how it fits into their view of how recovery will be achieved.
- Fitchett’s (2002) 7 X 7 Model
- Assessment of Global Spiritual Meaning
- The Integration of Stressful Life Experiences Scale (ISLES)

© 2020 StartAgain

24

Fitchett's (2002) 7 X 7 Model: Domains of Spirituality to Include in an Assessment of the Spiritual Domain

- Belief and Meaning
- Vocation and Obligations
- Experience and Emotion
- Courage and Growth
- Ritual and Practice
- Community
- Authority and Guidance

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 102
© 2020 StartAgain

25

Fitchett's (2002) 7 X 7 Model: Domains of Spirituality to Include in an Assessment of the Spiritual Domain

- Belief and Meaning: What beliefs have provided the client with a sense of meaning and purpose? What symbols reflect or express meaning for the client? What is their story? Do any current problems have a specific meaning or alter this meaning? Is the client affiliated with a formal system of belief (e.g., church or temple) either currently or in the past?
- Vocation and Obligations: Do the client's beliefs and sense of meaning in life create a sense of duty, vocation, calling, or moral obligation? Will current problems compromise or conflict with a perceived ability to fulfill these duties? Are current problems seen as a sacrifice or atonement, or are they in any other way related to a perceived sense of duty?

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 102
© 2020 StartAgain

26

Fitchett's (2002) 7 X 7 Model: Domains of Spirituality to Include in an Assessment of the Spiritual Domain

- Experience and Emotion: What contacts with the sacred, divine, or demonic has the client had? What emotions have been experienced in these contacts and with the person's beliefs, meaning in life, and associated sense of vocation?
- Courage and Growth: Can views of the trauma be fit into existing beliefs and symbols? If not, can the client change or let these beliefs and symbols go to allow more helpful ones emerge?

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 102
© 2020 StartAgain

27

Fitchett's (2002) 7 X 7 Model: Domains of Spirituality to Include in an Assessment of the Spiritual Domain

- Ritual and Practice: What rituals and practices are associated with the survivor's beliefs and meaning in life? Has the trauma changed their perceived need for these, or in their ability to perform or participate in those that are more important to them?
- Community: Is the client part of one or more formal or informal communities of shared belief, meaning in life, ritual, or practice? What is the style of the client's participation in these communities? To what extent does the client experience these relationships—with the community, spiritual leader, God—as positive and supportive?

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 102
© 2020 StartAgain

28

Fitchett's (2002) 7 X 7 Model: Domains of Spirituality to Include in an Assessment of the Spiritual Domain

- Authority and Guidance: Where does the client find authority for beliefs, meaning in life, vocation, and rituals and practices? Where does the client look for guidance when faced with doubt, confusion, tragedy, or conflict? To what extent does the client look within or without for guidance?

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 102
© 2020 StartAgain

29

Assessment of Global Spiritual Meaning

- Core elements of global meaning: Beliefs, sense of purpose, and goals and values.
- Beliefs: What story (or stories) have you told about who you are and why things happen? What are your beliefs in a higher power? If you believe in a higher power, what do you see as the nature of this higher power? What do you believe happens after people die? How do you believe that you should live out your beliefs?

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 105
© 2020 StartAgain

30

Assessment of Global Spiritual Meaning

- Sense of purpose: How much does your life feel meaningful? When does your life feel more or less meaningful? What do you do to develop your sense of meaning and purpose? How much does your spiritual life contribute to your sense of meaning and purpose?
- Goals and values: What provides meaning in your life? What is most important to you? How do you pursue and maintain those things most important to you? What are you doing to attempt to meet your spiritual and secular goals?

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 105
© 2020 StartAgain

31

Assessment of Global Spiritual Meaning: Making Meaning from the Trauma

- Core elements of meaning of the trauma: Beliefs, sense of purpose, and goals and values.
- Beliefs: What do you believe about why the trauma happened? How do you see and feel about yourself as a result of the trauma? In what ways, if any, have your stories about yourself and your world changed? What was your higher power's role, if any, in your trauma? Do you perceive your community of faith, higher power, and clergy as supportive of you? Have your beliefs about other people, your world, and your higher power changed? Do you feel any conflicts in your religious or spiritual beliefs? How do you resolve these conflicts?

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 105
© 2020 StartAgain

32

Assessment of Global Spiritual Meaning: Making Meaning from the Trauma

- Sense of purpose: How did the trauma affect your sense of meaning and purpose? Have you experienced a change in your sense of meaning and purpose?
- Goals and values: How did the trauma disrupt or take away the things that are important to you? Did it change your life direction? How have your goals or the values you hold changed? If you feel less able to meet your goals than before, what barriers do you perceive?

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, p. 105
© 2020 StartAgain

33

The Integration of Stressful Life Experiences Scale (ISLES)

- Indicate the extent (on a scale of 1-5) to which the client agrees or disagrees with statements regarding the loss resulting from trauma.
- Examples:
 - Since this loss, the world seems like a confusing and scary place.
 - I have made sense of this loss.
 - If or when I talk about this loss, I believe people see me differently.
 - I have difficulty integrating this loss into my understanding about the world.

Park, Currier, Harris, & Slattery, 2017, pp. 242-243
© 2020 StartAgain

34

The Posited Spiritual Elements of the Eight Phase Protocol

- Siegel (2018) identifies the following elements of EMDR therapy that make it a fertile ground for a transpersonal, spiritual model:
- “The internal focus during silent spaces in reprocessing,
- The use of the imagination,
- The ability on the part of the therapist to facilitate a deep experience of connection,
- The BLS component” (p. 28).

© 2020 StartAgain

35

The Posited Spiritual Elements of the Eight Phase Protocol

- “Although the attention of the client is not in a meditative state in the standard protocol, the silent space of reprocessing trauma with the use of auditory or tactile BLS and eyes closed creates the potential for the client to shift into an altered state of awareness.”

Siegel, 2018, p. 29

© 2020 StartAgain

36

The Posited Spiritual Elements of the Eight Phase Protocol

- Mindfulness
- Resources: Anything that is healthy and/or adaptive for the client in front of you, including any and all spiritual themes and practices.
- Resource Development and Installation (Leeds): Specifically spiritual or metaphorical resources

© 2020 StartAgain

37

The Posited Spiritual Elements of the Eight Phase Protocol

- When trauma is pathological and not properly processed, the information from the traumatic memory is trapped somewhere other than the neocortex, which is where capacity for making meaning exists.
- EMDR therapy reprocesses traumatic material to a place where meaning is made.
- This gives the client the capacity to have a brain and body based spiritual experience.

© 2020 StartAgain

38

Spiritual Elements of Phase 1 and 2

- In Phase 1, discover any spiritual elements of the client's history whether they are resources or trauma related.
- Many therapists identify creating therapeutic rapport as a spiritual activity.
- In Phase 2, help clients to build a kit of tools/resources, remaining open to and encouraging of any resources that engage them in a spiritual connection if that is something they are attuned to and drawn to, which many clients are.
- Also in phase 2, respect and respond to the client's current spiritual practices, helping them to both enhance them and find new avenues.

© 2020 StartAgain

39

Spiritual Elements of Phases 3-6

- Focus on the mindfulness aspect of spirituality.
- View mindfulness not just as a clinical tool but also as a spiritual intervention, based on the Buddhist Eightfold Path, which is a psychological but spiritually languaged template.
- Shapiro using the language of "what are you noticing now?" and "notice that" serves as a spiritual device in addition to any scientific basis it may have.
- The fact that this language is such a central aspect of the protocol helps explain nonlinear ways people reprocess and the spiritual language that comes up in the midst of reprocessing.

© 2020 StartAgain

40

Spiritual Elements of Phase 7 and 8

- In phase 7, identify resources, sometimes spiritual, that are helpful for the client's use in session and to soothe the client's nervous system.
- In phase 8, leverage the spiritual connection built through the rapport of the relationship and help the client trust the protocol.
- Constantly reevaluating and noticing any movement in the spiritual realm, whether it be in the development of spiritual resources or relief from spiritual traumas and having this figure into the reevaluation of the treatment plan.

© 2020 StartAgain

41

Spiritual Elements of Phase 7 and 8

- When clients are sharing, they are integrating their insights; listen for and be able to work with spiritual terms the client uses to describe their experience and have the cultural competency and awareness to honor that in the client.
- Sometimes there is a connection between spiritual trauma and the healing of spiritual trauma; there can be a spiritual through line of the whole experience.
- Sometimes spiritual trauma is healed and sometimes there is a new spirituality formed.

© 2020 StartAgain

42

Mindfulness and EMDR Therapy

- “EMDR therapy itself is a mindfulness practice for both clinician and client that results in the dedicated reprocessing of material that then allows for a more settled and comprehensive relationship with the classical mindfulness practices.”
- “Embedded within EMDR therapy are several elements addressed by mindfulness, including stabilization, grounding, resourcing, and the ability to toggle between somatic and cognitive experience.”

Marich & Dansiger, 2018, p. 15; p. 14

© 2020 StartAgain

43

Case Example 1

- Male in his 20s
- Institutionalized at age 12 for 72 hours
- Believed in God before hospitalization, never since
- Believed hospitalization was the one true target (before and after)
- Went through 12 sessions of EMDR reprocessing
- Declared at the end of therapy a renewed faith

© 2020 StartAgain

44

Case Example 2

- Male in his 50s
- 20 years of mindfulness practice
- 30 years of on-again/off-again opioid use
- PTSD led to relapse and new treatment episode
- Treated as EMDR client upon admission
- Renewed Buddhist practice and reprocessed PTSD in 60 days
- Left treatment free of PTSD diagnosis

© 2020 StartAgain

45

Case Example 3

- Female in her 40s
- Childhood trauma - Profound sexual and physical abuse
- Medical trauma - Ongoing chronic illness, near death several times
- Found spirituality in 12 step program years earlier
- Entered therapy claiming loss of faith and desire to use substances due to PTSD
- Spiritual language throughout reprocessing, spiritual language in reevaluation
- Client claimed EMDR therapy solidified 12 step program and vice versa

© 2020 StartAgain

46

Case Example 4

- Male in his 30s
- Veteran
- Deep moral injury due to distance-oriented combat role
- Client claimed either vengeful God or no God at admission
- Client reprocessed combat and childhood trauma during 6-month treatment
- Client claimed reclamation of faith and meaning

© 2020 StartAgain

47

Case Examples in the Literature

- EMDR therapy “has the capacity to induce significant expansions of awareness and extraordinary, or transpersonal, content” (p. 324).
- EMDR therapy can facilitate or catalyze the movement of consciousness through the three stages of spiritual awakening: a spiritual path in which spirituality is first recognized outside of oneself, then within oneself, and finally a nondual understanding of oneness with external and internal spirituality.

Krystal et al., 2002

© 2020 StartAgain

48

Case Examples in the Literature

- “Clients frequently report having spontaneous insights that allow them to view past traumas with clarity and detachment and sometimes to understand how the actions of those who hurt them arose out of ignorance and abuse.”
- “EMDR clients sometimes report unusual somatic experiences, such as the openings of energy centers and the emergence of ascending or descending currents of energy along the spine.”

Krystal et al., 2002, p. 324
© 2020 StartAgain

49

Case Examples in the Literature

- “Clients also report experiences with inner guides, deceased loved ones, mythic journeys, and other imaginal representations of their spirituality.”
- “They also at times report feelings of profound gratitude for life, deep joy, the sense of being interconnected with all living beings, and the sense of feeling a relationship to or identification with the divine or being.”

Krystal et al., 2002, p. 324
© 2020 StartAgain

50

Case Examples in the Literature

- “Clients typically report experiences of deep calm and a sense of ‘spaciousness’ following the complete processing of a disturbing life event.
- They may report flashes of insight into reality, profound experiences of peace, love and joy, or experience a felt connection with life as a ‘miracle.’”

Parnell, 1996, p. 145
© 2020 StartAgain

51

Case Examples in the Literature

- “As a result of EMDR processing, clients may have spontaneous transpersonal or ‘beyond the ego’ experiences. These experiences of something beyond the personal self take different forms and may include other states of consciousness.”

Parnell, 1996, p. 145
© 2020 StartAgain

52

Other States of Consciousness Experienced By Clients as a Result of EMDR Processing

- Transcendence and ecstasy,
- Psychic experiences that transcend space and time,
- Spiritual experiences of enlightenment,
- Deep self-awareness,
- Mysticism,
- Epiphanies,
- Moving spiritual insights,
- Profound experiences of love and compassion for self and others,
- Forgiveness,
- Dramatic energy releases,
- Experiences of bliss and sensory enhancement,
- Experiences of peace and equanimity, and
- A deep sense of well-being.

Parnell, 1996, p. 145
© 2020 StartAgain

53

Thank You!

May you be free from fear.
May you be healed.
May you be happy.
May you be at ease.

Stephen Dansiger, PsyD, LMFT
steve@drdansiger.com

© 2020 StartAgain

54

References

Available upon request from Justine@startagainassociates.com

© 2020 StartAgain

55