

Healing Trauma Part Four: One Woman's Healing

During An Attack

One and a half years before I began dating one of my girlfriends, she was raped at night in her bed with a knife at her throat. The way that she described the time during the rape was that she felt detached. She said she just laid there. She was not stuck in the freeze response. ([Healing Trauma Part Three](#) is entirely about the freeze response.) She was trying to figure out her best chance of survival. A knife was at her throat the entire time, so any movement could have ended her life.

The rapist finally left. She knew who the man was. The man had been stalking her roommate. Her roommate wasn't home that night and he decided to attack her instead. (At times, I'm going to use the word attack in the article. Reading the word rape many times can be traumatic.) She testified in court against the man. He got a long prison sentence.

Using Talk Therapy

She spent the entire next year releasing the trauma of the rape. She was in hell during this time. Gradually she began living a full life again. We started dating about a year and a half after she was attacked. She wasn't fully healed when we met, though she was greatly healed.

She tried talk therapy (going to a therapist). She found one significant piece of help. The one important insight that talk therapy gave her was that rape has nothing to do with sex. In therapy she learned that rape is about having power over the other person.

My girlfriend fully embraced that rape had nothing to do with sex; even though the attack was a sexual act. We had an intimate and fun sex life. As far as I could tell, she did not become dysfunctional in relation to sex because of being attacked.

She left talk therapy after a short time. She found that by talking about the attack she was feeling more of a victim of rape rather than being helped to heal from being attacked.

The First Key Element In Her Healing

She had three key elements to her healing. Each element was essential to her healing. The first element was that her best friend and roommate was empathetic. Her roommate also financially supported her for that first year; allowing her to focus on her healing.

On pages five and six in [Healing Trauma Part One](#), I wrote of how [Peter Levine](#) stated that a woman holding his hand was essential to his healing from the trauma of being hit by a car. Without her calming presence, he didn't think that he could have healed at that time. You can [click here](#) to go to my dropbox account to listen to the seven minute audio segment about how he healed after being hit by a car when he was walking. You'll start in the middle of a chapter. You may need a few sentences to settle into what's been said.

The Second Key Element In Her Healing

The second key element in her healing was to allow herself to cry as many tears as there were. She cried what seemed endlessly for almost a year. Her crying helped release the trauma.

There can be times when people cry and they're reinforcing what they want to be free from. A person may cry and at the same time think 'I'll never be happy.' In this example as the emotion of crying is felt deeply, the person can also be reinforcing the thought. (Proper and improper cathartic crying is addressed on page 4 of [Healing Trauma Part One](#)).

My girlfriend cried without much of a story. She cried because of the shattered feeling that was there. She stayed with her feelings and cried and cried. She said that she cried until she had no more tears left. The crying was done. In the year and a half that we were living together, I never knew her to cry about the attack or to be frozen because of being attacked.

Prescription drugs like anti-depressants would have helped suppress her crying, so that would have been a very bad choice for her.

The Third Key Element In Her Healing

The third key element in her healing was that she would tone for many hours every week. This is the part of her healing that, until this week, I didn't understand why it helped her so much. She'd tone at home or on the beach. Toning is when a person makes different sounds that physically vibrate their body; primarily in the chest and throat area. It's very beneficial for the vibration from the sound to also vibrate the face, belly, back, and even the arms and legs.

An example of toning that many people are familiar with is when a person chants the word Om. They say or sing out Om for the entire out breath. She credited toning with making a huge and essential impact in her healing. Each person needs to find a form (or multiple forms) of help that works for them. My girlfriend was empathetically supported by her friend, she cried and cried because she felt shattered and she used toning.

It's only this week that I understood the brilliance of her toning. When she told me (in 1993) that toning was one of her main avenues to healing, I didn't understand why toning was so helpful and essential for her recovery. Toning is a way for the body to vibrate. She used the toning sounds to create the body to vibrate/tremble.

The body trembling without toning is what David Berceci, Peter Levine and I encourage a person to do. (Trembling is addressed on page three of [Healing Trauma Part Two](#).) Toning has its benefits, though toning is not the same as the body trembling.

My girlfriend didn't know about the body trembling as a primary way to release trauma. She would have embraced trembling. With how well toning helped her, it's almost 100% assured that trembling would have substantially aided her recovery. She did an incredible job of healing from one of the most terrifying experiences that a person can have.

Concluding Insights Into Her Healing

She knew that there were feelings, emotions and thoughts inside her from being raped that she wanted to be free from. She used toning as the way for her body to vibrate/tremble.

She also used proper cathartic crying as a way to release the held energy of the trauma. (Proper and improper cathartic crying is addressed on page 4 of [Healing Trauma Part One](#)). And, very importantly, she had the empathic support of her best friend.

She went with her gut in what she did in order to heal. She was blessed to find a person to teach her how to vibrate/tremble her body back to wholeness through toning (working directly with the reptilian brain) and to be able to properly cathartically cry (working directly with the mammalian brain). These two approaches had a cascading effect to help her mind (the neo-cortex) to also heal.

Prelude To The Next Article: The Top-Down And The Bottom-Up Approaches To Healing Trauma

To not be fully healed after being raped, even decades later, is very tragic and common. What is also common is for women to rely on talk therapy and drug therapy as the main ways to heal from the trauma of rape. Talk therapy and drug therapy are the primary therapies in the top-down approach to healing trauma.

Bessel Van Der Kolk, Peter Levine and David Berceci are all advocates of the bottom-up approach to healing trauma. They're also outspoken in their criticism of the top-down approach. The bottom-up approach is when the more primal/instinctual part of the brain releases trauma (the reptilian brain that governs the body) and the emotional brain (the mammalian brain) also releases trauma to help the thinking brain (the neo-cortex) to release the trauma. Peter Levine, in his book [In An Unspoken Voice](#), addresses the bottom-up approach. It's very difficult for women to think, introspect or analyze (part of the top-down approach) their way out of the trauma from being raped.

This way of assisting the body to release the held energy of the trauma through trembling (and through other methods addressed in Healing Trauma Part One and Part Two), of allowing the feelings and emotions to keep expressing themselves (while staying as much as possible with the body sensations and to not be fixed on the mind's commentary) is the basis of the bottom-up approach.

As the bottom (the reptilian brain a.k.a. the sensate body) releases the trauma this can produce a positive cascading effect for the emotions (the mammalian brain a.k.a. the limbic system) to release the trauma, and this positive cascading effect then can help the neo-cortex (the thinking brain) to release the trauma.

Some Additional Clarification

In the next article, the concept of the triune brain is introduced. I'm going to include the next paragraph so that the reader will know that as one part of the brain changes, the other two parts also change.

We have a triune brain (the reptilian brain regulating our body, the mammalian brain regulating our emotions and the neo-cortex regulating our thinking) where all three parts of the brain are communicating with each other and are working together. In a triune brain, when one of the three parts of the brain changes (toward positive or toward negative), the other two parts of the brain are similarly affected (toward positive or toward negative).

The bottom-up approach is not that change always needs to start at the bottom (the reptilian brain a.k.a. the body), though making sure the body is involved is very important in the bottom-up approach. The body is very involved while trembling. A connection to the body, more than to the mind, while the emotions are releasing is also important in the bottom-up approach. As emotions release, the person is not necessarily in a cathartic state. Emotions are often felt, stayed with and released in a state much less intense than catharsis.

The bottom-up approach and the top-down approach to healing trauma is the subject of the next article [Healing Trauma Part Five: The Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches](#).

May all beings live in fullness.