

We often act, instinctively and unconsciously, in ways that are healing – to ourselves, to others and to the world as a whole.

But this is not enough. In order to be maximally effective in our healing work, we need to:

1. Know (i.e. be conscious of) what the elements of a healthy world are,
2. Know (generally and specifically) the ways in which the world is wounded,
3. Consider what we mean by “healing”,
4. Consider which strategies may be effective, and
5. Consciously choose our own entry point (or entry points) into the wide range of healing activities that are presently available – or the new ones that we’ll create.

1. The Healthy World

The universe we live in is a place and a process that we are continually learning about. We can, therefore, only describe it to the extent that we, in all humility, have come to know it. I offer these items as my best attempt to name the elements of a healthy world:

- It is a place of natural beauty, power, and continual change.
- It is beyond our control but open to our impact. It is a co-creative phenomenon.
- Its reality is a unified whole.
- It is capable of inspiring awe, amazement, wonder, humility, and surrender.
- It includes, at least amongst humans, a growing consciousness of the interconnectedness of all existence.
- It includes joy, ecstasy, humour, sexuality, creativity, and opportunity.
- It includes experimentation, fallibility, and errors.
- It includes fear, grief, and anger.
- It includes natural catastrophes, accidents, disease, pain, and (sometimes violent) death.
- It includes a rich multitude of human cultures, representative of our dreams and hopes, symbols of our “wildly inquisitive and astonishingly adaptive species”.

2. Wounds

For one reason or another, there are wounds that have we’ve acquired throughout the process of our evolution – that have been transmitted from one generation to the next. These wounds have become embedded in our selves and in our societies. They may be described as emotional, spiritual, physical, or societal – even though they are interrelated.

Emotional/Spiritual/Physical

We live in a culture of:

- Excessive fear
- Greed
- Despair
- Depression
- Meaninglessness
- Loneliness / isolation
- Loss / grief / sadness
- Powerlessness
- Self-inflicted physical deterioration and ill-health

Societal

Our emotional and spiritual wounds manifest in a wide variety of unjust social constructs – for example:

- Authoritarianism and dominance
- Exploitation
- Lies and deception
- Bigotry and oppression
- Slavery
- Militarism
- Tribalism
- Nationalism
- Imperialism and colonialism
- Species-ism (for lack of a better word)
- Disrespect for the natural world – including the destruction of biodiversity
- Assault on indigenous cultures – including the destruction of ethnodiversity
- Loss of access to safe drinking water
- Frenetic lifestyles
- Commodification and commercialization of life
- Economic systems built on the profit motive, proprietorship, and law and order above human and other needs.

The woundedness of our world is apparent in our daily lives in, amongst others, the following specific ways:

- Hunger and starvation

- Homelessness and landlessness / Marginalization of “disposable” peoples
- Shortage of adequate clothing
- Inadequate access to good education
- Inadequate healthcare
- Environmental pollution and destruction
- Cruelty towards animals
- Inappropriate (sometimes dangerous) genetic engineering (food, people)
- Self-neglect
- Neglect and abandonment of elders
- Theft (local, national, international)
- Loss of the Commons (air, water, seed stock, etc.)
- Pandemics (AIDS, cancer, malaria, etc.)
- Addictions to substances, emotions, sex, beliefs, etc.
- Overwork
- Neglect of the creative arts
- Suicide
- Violence (assault, murder, torture, rape, etc.)
- Armament production and use
- Human migration practices (immigration, refugees, deportation, etc.)

3. Healing

There are a vast multitude of activities that can be construed as healing. Because there are so many options and paths to follow, and because the nature of our wounds is so diverse, there is no way to organize an overall healing strategy for the planet. Instead, I see this process as one that is essentially chaotic and I see numerous points of entry for those of us who venture into the field of healing in a conscious manner.

However, I do see some general principles in the ways we think about healing. Broadly speaking, I see two categories into which we can divide our healing activities – one in which we *add* something to the world (beauty, knowledge, love, compassion, etc.) and one in which we *take something away* from the world (suffering, conflict, injustice, etc.). The first set consists of activities that are, I believe, necessary for a balanced and more successful approach to healing – namely, activities whereby we participate in the celebration and protection of what we understand as the ways of the natural, healthy world. Then, with activities that fall into the second set – as with a physically wounded

from the acute effects of the wound *and* to eliminate its chronic causes.

Participation in the Healthy World

Note that while these practices are an essential part of our nature and deserve to be enjoyed for their own sake, they are, in many cases, also acts of resistance to the wounding. Practicing them will help provide us with the solid platform we need in order to address the wounds evident in our world.

They include:

- Heart-opening experiences / love, empathy, compassion
- Spiritual, ritual, transcendent experiences
- Celebration and play
- Music, song, dance
- Creativity
- Personal reflection / introspection
- Family, friendship, and community
- Self-care (food, exercise, rest, etc.)
- Collaboration and cooperation
- Building trust, hope, beauty, abundance
- Meaningful work

Relief from Acute Effects

These activities ease or relieve the immediate effects of the wounds and are generally short term in their focus. Because we are able to manifest short term gains (at least for some people), they also help boost our morale and undercut despair and depression. They include:

- Activities in support of specific people (refugee claimants, cancer victims, Amnesty International, etc.)
- Charitable work (a wide variety! – MSF, clothing for homeless people, food banks, AIDS work, Habitat for Humanity, etc., etc., etc.)
- Anti-war activities (in relation to particular conflicts)
- Pollution cleanup

Elimination of Chronic Causes

These activities are longer term in their focus and much more challenging. They call for drastic changes in all of us and in our societies. The (usually) slow nature of progress in these areas can lead to despair and other such feelings – hence the need for the two aspects of healing already referred to. The third set of activities includes:

- Non-violence and conflict resolution training
- Democracy training

- Redefining politics as a process of providing and coordinating services to citizens
- Building peace
- Education reform
- Healthcare reform
- Promoting personal empowerment
- Diversity / equity projects
- Building just, equitable, enforceable international agreements and structures (including a renewed UN)
- International development projects
- Refugee / immigration justice
- Elimination of all forms of slavery
- Environmental defense work – protecting and reclaiming the Commons; planting trees, gardens, etc.; protection of wild spaces
- Promotion of environmentally sustainable, equitable and just economic practices (organic farming; alternative trading practices that meet local needs; etc.) – i.e. a “New Bottom Line” for business.

4. Strategies

There are numerous strategies that can be applied to this work – as well as a wide range of organizations doing healing work. To maximize our effectiveness and chances of success, I offer a few thoughts:

- Work from an assumption of the interconnectedness and unity of all Being.
- Make Heart, Mind, Body, Emotion and Spirit integral parts of the process.
- Work for the good of everything – in the present and in the future (“unto 7 generations”)
- Gather information (as accurate as possible) about what “has been” and “what is” – this will be a base from which to create “what might be”.
- Define the idea (goal) *and* create the conditions for its birth and/or growth and/or manifestation. (“There is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come”.)
- We can’t *make* people change their minds and ways – but we can create the conditions under which they choose to change.
- Small, often simple, regularly repeated doses of heart- and eye- and mind-opening activities in loving, respectful contexts may work best (like water dripping onto a stone) – for ourselves and others.

- We will make mistakes and we can learn from them as we proceed.
- Be patient and loving – with ourselves and others.

5. Entry Points

I believe that each of us, as part of our commitment to a journey of healing, needs to look both within ourselves and beyond ourselves. What are our callings, strengths, desires and dreams? And what is it in the world outside ourselves that calls to us, draws us in? Who else do we choose to engage in such activities with?

Then we take a step; we leap from the cliff and see where life takes us! And we find that we are not alone on this journey. Just as it takes a village to educate a child, so it takes many of us, working together, here and everywhere else, today and tomorrow, to heal the world.

To close, here’s a quote from the Talmud:

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief.

Do justly, now.

Love mercy, now.

Walk humbly, now.

You are not obliged to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

This sentiment was phrased slightly differently in a Joint Ecumenical statement from a number of Protestant churches on 8 March 2005:

“But it is not enough for us as a Church or a society to be merciful. We must remember the admonition of the prophet Micah. “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah's choice of verbs is instructive. We are not to love justice or preach justice, we are to do justice – to act, and, when necessary, to struggle.”

Gabe Epstein

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