

Healing emotional wounds

Victor Frankl, the famous Austrian psychiatrist, talks of three values that we can employ to battle wounds: creative, experiential and attitudinal. Productive employment of these values lend meaning to our life...



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The dictionary defines ‘wound’ as injury. There can be wounds to the body, emotions and mind. Let’s dwell on wounds that afflict emotions.

The wound of regret

A couple married for many years began to drift apart. One day they each chanced upon an advertisement inviting people who liked to sing in the rain and loved the smell of flowers to meet and find their soulmates. When they arrived separately at the venue they were surprised to see each other. Said the woman to the man, “I never knew you liked getting wet in the rain or that you liked the fragrance of flowers.” The man sheepishly acquiesced. They said to each other, holding hands, “I truly love you but I have never said this to you in so many years and this is my deepest regret.”

The wound of regret injures each of us because we desire. Desire in itself is neither good nor bad, yet when it leaves the lingering feeling of ‘I wish I could have done this’, or ‘I wish I could have been that’, it causes pain. Regret therefore becomes a crippling feeling which does

not allow us to grow up and move on. Letting go of regret is not easy. Yet recognising its debilitating effect will certainly help each of us to work towards diminishing it in our lives.

The wound of sorrow

When you love there is bound to be loss, and every time you encounter this loss there is sadness and sorrow. Sorrow that hinders the flow of life is a wound.

Two sons of an alcoholic father grew up in very different ways. One turned out a rake and the other a successful lawyer. When interviewed about career choices, the son who had turned out no good said he was sad for he had only seen pain and misery in his life. The other son was sad too that he had seen pain and misery but he had chosen to combat it. Sorrow was present for both sons, yet one had chosen to be energised by it and the other to be crippled.

Sorrow that does not let us grow into a fully functioning human being is crippling and must be worked through.

The wound of resentment

Anger that does not go away turns to resentment. When such a wound lacerates the emotions, it grips us in a way that limits us and affects all our actions.

A motorist on a highway was stranded with a flat tyre. He did not have a tyre-jack to change the flat. His immediate reaction was anger at his driver, who had perhaps forgotten to place the jack in the car boot. He spotted a house in the distance and began moving towards it, all the while cursing his driver with growing resentment. Unconsciously, he conjured up images of an unfriendly host in the house and prepared an angry reply. On reaching the house, he knocked and an old man answered. No sooner did the door open than the car owner began shouting at the old man, cursing him and his good fortune at not having a flat tyre to change. The result was an upset old man and an unsolved problem.

Resentment is a wound that limits us and makes us less human. Recognising its treacherous manipulation of our mood and sentiment, we must always guard against building up resentment inside us.

The wound of fear

Fear that encourages us to avoid dangerous situations is healthy. Yet fear which is self-imposed causes neurotic anxiety.

A young child often came late from school and his mother admonished him each time he did so. Yet the child would not mend his ways, so the mother decided to instil fear in him. She told him that a ghost lurked in the neighbourhood and would grab him if he came home late.

The child then began returning early. One day, however, he was delayed unavoidably and ran home greatly fearing the ghost. He contracted high fever that night. No doctor could help him as they attributed his illness to psychosomatic conditions. The mother decided to tie an amulet around his arm to ward off the ghost. The boy grew up wearing the amulet. Fear which had been instilled now became a crutch.

Fear that is engendered by misplaced beliefs and illusion pervades our life and prevents us from growing up.

All wounds, therefore, cause sickness, which can be combated through a simple remedy. The prophylactic for wounds is the recognition that each of us has the choice to respond. Victor Frankl, the famous Austrian psychiatrist, talks of three values that we can employ to battle wounds: creative, experiential and attitudinal. Productive employment of these values lend meaning to our life in terms of coping successfully, drawing on experiences from life and responding to suffering with positivity.

Growth psychology unequivocally tells us that we are not conditioned robots responding only as we have been trained to respond. Nor are we the irreversible products of our toilet-training of childhood experiences. We are free of the past, not inhibited or constrained by it. We are free agents, able to choose how to behave and how to react to changing circumstances.

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