

In G. Misra (Ed.), **History of Science, Philosophy and Culture: Psychology and psychoanalysis** (Vol. 9). New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research.(in press)
Concept, Characteristics and Process of Psychological Healing

Jyoti Anand, Allahabad¹

Ajit K Dalal, University of Allahabad

The concept of healing was conspicuously absent in both research and teaching in the disciplines of medicine and psychology till recent times. As noted by Cassell (1991), the terms suffering and healing rarely figured in the subject indices of medical and psychology textbooks till the last Century. According to Cassell, modern medicine is more obsessed with studying human body with the methods of physical sciences and has lost touch with the human side of disease and pain. Medical science has made tremendous progress in the last Century in understanding human body, the causes of various afflictions and treatment procedures. The discovery of sulfa drugs in the 1930s and antibiotics in the 1940s put the doctors at the pinnacle of their powers and influence. Certainly, curative powers of a physician are much greater than ever before, but it did not improve their power to heal psychologically. As Siegel (1990) pointed out, "... our power to heal people and their lives seems to have diminished as dramatically as our power to cure diseases has increased" (p.141). Since the focus in medicine is on diseases and bodily condition and not on the individual who is suffering, the notions of suffering and healing hardly find any place in medical discourse. The same was true with psychology which otherwise claims to be a study of human mind and behaviour. Even clinical and health psychology have confined themselves to the study of mental and physical health problems, causation, treatment and recovery, and rarely dealt with matters of psychological healing.

On the contrary, all religions of the world are primarily concerned with the alleviation of human suffering. They offer varied explanations of why people suffer and

¹ Address for correspondence: Jyoti Anand, 99 Allengunj, Allahabad – 211002, India.
email: jyotiajit@gmail.com

how they can heal, and therefore the relevance of religion has not waned in the age of science. People seek solace in religious discourses and frequent places of worship to heal their troubled psyche. In traditional societies like India, health and well-being are closely associated with spiritual healing. As pointed out by Kleinman (1988) a vast majority of people in these societies believe in the supernatural causes of health and illness, and approach traditional healers for physical and mental health problems. People seek the help of priests, mystics, shamans and diviners to alleviate their social, economic as well as moral crises. These holy men and women are part of the local communities and are accessible to all those who seek their services to deal with crises and catastrophes. As Kakar (1982) wrote, “The diversity of these traditions in India and the astonishing variety and number of practitioners can make a stranger to the country feel that healing – in its manifold aspects - is a central individual and cultural preoccupation, an impression which may not be far off the mark”(p. 3). From ancient times Indians have been involved in developing explanatory systems for mental distress and finding ways for its alleviation. Consistent with the cultural beliefs the healing practices have wide acceptance and have survived on their popular appeal.

In present times there has been a resurgence of interest in healing in academic psychology as well as in popular literature. A large number of healing therapies are available, claiming their efficacy in relieving physical and psychological pain. In the market economy, healing has become a hot selling commodity and often there are exaggerated claims about the effectiveness of various healing techniques. So much so, that the commercial products such as soaps and cosmetics also try to capitalize on the popularity of this term, by offering the so-called ‘healing touch’ to the consumers. If one were to surf the net, one would realize how rampant this business of 'healing' is. There are more than 33,40,000 sites for alternative healing in Google Search and a large number of these websites offer attractive packages to alleviate physical, mental and spiritual suffering of their prospective clients.

In spite of all these developments and growing body of research the concept of psychological healing is still nebulous and used synonymously with recovery, treatment, coping, therapy and well-being. There is not much research to bridge the gap between popular understanding of the terms and their usage in scientific psychology. There is a

dearth of research investigating what is psychological healing, its characteristic features and manifestations. In this chapter effort is made to map the domain within which the healing process derives its meaning. The studies of healing stories conducted by these authors (Anand, 2006; Anand, 2004; Anand, Srivastava & Dalal; 2001, Dalal, in press) provided the inputs for the present formulation of the concept of psychological healing, its characteristic features and the process of psychological healing.

The Domain of Psychological Healing

The Indian tradition and scriptures have primarily focused on Self-realization as the primary goal of human endeavour, and consequently transcending the dichotomy of suffering and healing. The emphasis is on the emancipatory methods of yoga and meditation to liberate oneself from *avidyā* (false knowledge), and thus from ignorance about one's true nature (Paranjpe, 1998). Psychology in the Indian tradition is a discipline of the 'inner world' aiming to realize truth and perfection in the human condition (Rao, 2005). The orientation is towards transcending existential limitations and attaining the state of bliss.

This, however, does not mean that in Indian culture there is no concern for personal well-being, physical and mental health and enhancing human potential. Till the time one identifies with the ego one seeks respite and healing from the worldly afflictions. Given the reality that most of the people live within the domain of ego and desire worldly pleasures and happiness the term 'healing' retains its relevance. In fact, most of the traditional and folk healing practices have taken the here-and-now approach to deal with personal and social calamities people go through with focus on improving psycho-spiritual health. Kakar, in his book 'Shamans, Mystics and Doctors' (1982) states that, "in my travels, I was also repeatedly struck by the overwhelming role that the "therapeutic" occupies in Indian culture and society, the sheer number of healers and the variety of their healing offers being only one manifestation of this traditional Indian preoccupation" (p.272). Dalal (in press) has discussed at length the psycho-social import of these traditional healing practices which aim to bring about a transformation in the internal state of a person. The work of Kakar (1982, 2003) and Kleinman (1980, 1988) has shown that most of these traditional practices are deeply entrenched in folk wisdom

and are based on sound theories of mind. They provide practical solutions to personal, familial and social problems, and have been integrated within the beliefs and practices of the local communities. That these healing techniques are practical and popular is evident from the fact that they still form the core of alternative local therapies.

In spite of wide popularity of traditional healing there is no term equivalent to healing in the Sanskrit language. There are terms such as happiness (sukha), well-being (khush-hali), fulfillment (samridhi), satisfaction (santosh), peace (shanti), health (niroga), etc., but no one term that would encapsulate within its fold the complete import of the term 'healing' in all its essence.

In Latin, the word 'healing' has its roots in the word 'healan', which connotes both the body and the spiritual element of the human being, as the thing to be healed. The Chambers Dictionary defines healing as '*becoming whole and healthy*'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as '*to save, purify, cleanse, repair, mend*'. Psychological healing may be understood as the *experience of an inner sense of well-being, harmony, balance, and peace*. It is a process through which the harmony between mind, body and spirit is restored. It would involve a transcendence of the existing state of consciousness, which would entail a reconstruction of one's reality, a change in attitude, and (broadening of) one's vision and perspective. Thus, healing does not change the situation, but enables the individual to deal effectively and appropriately with the existing situation. Psychological healing, thus, engenders hope, acceptance, release of trapped psychic energy, resolution of internal conflicts and new insights.

Physical illness or injury may be a source of suffering, but psychological healing is not necessarily contingent on recovery from these afflictions. It is also not contingent on the removal of material causes of suffering, be it loss of job, break in relationship or bereavement, or social or natural calamity. Healing may occur even when nothing changes in the world people live in. It occurs when the turmoil within the person subsides and the person experiences an inner sense of well-being.

The domain of healing subsumes within its fold treatment, cure, coping, recovery, sound health, therapy, well-being, and all that goes with them. There are multiple systems, modalities or pathways to healing, like Āyurveda, Homeopathy, thought healing, faith healing, magnetic healing, meditation technique, healing through

vibrations, esoteric healing, spiritual healing, pranic healing, dance therapy, gem therapy, aroma therapy, acupressure therapy, mud therapy, mantra therapy, and colour therapy. All of these operate in a socio-cultural field, and implicate certain cultural beliefs and practices, without which it is not possible to discuss what healing means.

In the current literature there is a single-minded preoccupation with the end-result of healing – which may be understood and believed to be the result of various kinds of ministrations, be they drugs, rituals, healing mediums in the form of a Guru, healer, therapist, doctor, or what have you. But there has, as yet, been no systematic attempt to understand the process of healing that gets activated in the inner realm, that plays its role surreptitiously and quietly (in consort with the external healing mediums).

Healing is a *very personal experience*, a '*state of mind*', which cannot be reduced to the level of measurable variables. It has cultural, metaphysical and spiritual overtones. Perhaps it were these aspects of healing that prevented psychology as a science from venturing to study this area. The terms which are closest to suffering and healing in psychology are stress and coping which are amenable to quantification and empirical research. Healing deals with the person as a whole, takes a holistic perspective, which is essentially a subjective experience.

People face and endure personal tragedies and there are generally only a few who succumb to it. Most people bounce back on their internal strength. Crisis becomes an occasion to mobilize internal resources, arrive at a new meaning and understanding of the situation which is conducive to recovery process. This recovery is further facilitated by familial and community support system which includes physicians, healers and healing institutions. Inadvertently, a personal crisis becomes an opportunity for learning and personal growth. A number of healing stories obtained by these authors were of those people who had undergone major life crises in the recent past. These were the kind of people we meet in our everyday life. They had their share of strengths, weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, limitations, and other added struggles of everyday life. The life stories of these women, who were exemplars in their own characteristic ways, helped in identifying and highlighting certain salient features of healing.

Salient characteristics of healing

Whatever the crisis be, people heal, though the nature of healing they show may vary from person to person. Healing brings about a change in the mental and emotional state of the person, such that he/she begins to take initiative for his personal growth and participates in social activities. There seems to be an element of universality which characterizes the healing experience in different cultures. However, within the Indian cultural context, social and spiritual aspects are given much more attention than physical and medical aspects...In the Indian cultural ethos the ultimate goal of life is cessation of all suffering by realizing one's true nature. Scriptures and different schools of thought deal with the methods of attaining that higher state. The notion of healing is thus more relevant within the traditional and folk practices, where concerns and crises are of mundane nature. The salient characteristics of healing are discussed from this perspective.

1. Coexistence of suffering and healing

Healing and suffering are inseparable as two sides of the same reality. Suffering sets the stage for healing to begin. The two are apparently diametrically opposite, yet it is these two that complete the cycle - and enwrap within their fold the entire expanse and spread of human experience. Suffering begets healing and vice versa, and thus the cycle continues. When one suffers, one's suffering is pregnant with the potential and possibilities of healing that one is capable of. Greater the suffering, more is the proclivity for the healing process to take over and restore the balance in one's life. The Mother (of Shri Aurobindo Ashram) says: "How close to the summits is he who awakens in the depths, for the deeper the abyss, the more the heights reveal themselves!"(p.36)

"You are being stripped of everything: that is the way towards plenitude. When you have nothing left, everything will be given to you. Because for those who are sincere and true, from the worst always comes the best" (p.36)

To elucidate this non-duality in the words of Khalil Gibran (1980), the renowned Sufi poet:

*Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.
And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises
was oftentimes filled with your tears.*

*...The deeper that sorrow carves into your being,
the more joy you can contain.
...When you are joyous, look deep into your heart
and you shall find it is only that
which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.
...they are inseparable.*

(The Prophet, p. 36-37)

The cycle of suffering and healing does not imply any causal chain; it is a natural process of life. The cycle represents the essential unity of the universe in which suffering and healing covers the entire range of human possibilities. The notion of circularity implies that suffering cannot continue forever, and the same applies to healing as well; thus, one goes through the ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ of life in a never-ending chain. The prevalence of one does not imply the absence of the other, rather, at any point of time one may surely imply the other.

2. Healing is holistic

Suffering causes fragmentation of self; healing is a process of becoming whole again. If we consider life as an intricate pattern of interconnectedness, then a change in one sphere is bound to effect concurrent changes in the whole pattern. So the experience of suffering and healing cannot be isolated events in the course of one’s life. They affect, and are simultaneously affected by the entire pattern of one’s life. Healing, thus, brings changes in all aspects of life.

Healing is a complete experience, in the sense, just as when a human being grows physically, the different parts of the body don’t grow individually, say first the legs and feet, then the torso, then the hands and arms, and then the head and face. The individual grows as a complete unit – the physical, emotional, mental, social and moral development of an individual take place as the person grows in age; if any of these different aspects of development are not in congruence with the other facets of development, then it is not a natural growth; it would be lop-sided, incomplete and defective. Likewise, for healing to be complete, it is a complete experience which affects the person as a complete mind-body-spirit-emotion unit. If healing is of isolated units, then it will neither be complete

nor enduring. Just as the experience of suffering cannot be an isolated event in the course of one's life, likewise healing not merely focuses on the suffering event but touches upon all the varied facets of one's life and experiences. Healing entails the restoration of the imbalance (caused by the suffering episode) in the wake of the loss and trauma that one suffered. With balance comes peace and harmony. This manifestation of healing is evident in the manner one deals with other life events, situations, and relationships.

3. Healing is non-linear

Healing has often been associated with time, in the sense that time has often been held as the greatest healer. It is a common belief that with the passage of time the intensity of emotional pain and loss seems to fade and people come to terms with the changed reality. This is true to some extent but the relationship between time and healing is not linear. Healing is not necessarily progressive, i.e., healing does not necessarily get better with the passage of time. Yes, with time one may learn to live with one's losses and so the intensity of one's suffering may lessen, but inevitable reminders of one's loss stimulate images of the lost other or the loss event.

Often when one would think that one has accepted and made peace with one's losses, something very inconsequential might just throw one off-balance. Sometimes, even without one's knowledge or understanding, one may suddenly feel liberated from the dismal feelings one was beset with; maybe moments later something just invades one's memory, and one is left totally robbed and dispirited. Horowitz (1976) has talked of mental landscapes or maps of what has happened to oneself. Part of what contributes to these mental landscapes is the fact that one quite regularly encounters environmental stimuli that remind oneself of one's losses.

These may be the lyrics of some music, reading of old diaries and letters, a tragic happening in the neighbourhood, arrival of an old acquaintance, or simply feeling lonely. They are endemic to one's physical worlds, and they have the power to evoke thoughts, feelings, and images. All these may rake up the old pain which was considered to have healed. Suffering thus has a propensity to resurface, at times, even compound, and one is called upon at such junctures to re-mobilize one's healing resources.

The narratives in our earlier studies have revealed that during the course of their healing journey people go through several highs and lows, ups and downs, and at times even suffer setbacks. Since healing has been understood to belong to the emotional realm, perhaps one may see similar ebb and flow in the healing process, as is the nature of emotions. Of course, in due course, people develop better skills to handle these relapses and carry on with their lives.

4. Healing is never complete

This brings us to the other characteristic feature of the healing process. Healing has no fixed beginning, nor a definite ending. . It rarely happens that suffering – whether physical, mental, or emotional gets completely alleviated. In the sense, that every suffering experience leaves behind its residual in some form, be it a scar, or a memory of the experience, but some reminder definitely remains with the person. So much so, that the person is no more the same after that particular suffering experience. His or her subsequent responses to situations and events get colored with the lessons one has learnt from one's suffering experience. One moves on in life, but the vulnerabilities as a result of that experience remain in the individual psyche till the person remains. Healing does take place, but the scars left behind by such traumatic experiences always make their presence felt in one's life at every lean and forlorn moment. During the course of healing, the pain one has undergone and lived with, somehow gets so intermeshed in one's life, that it can never be eradicated from one's psyche till the person exists. Throughout life, people experience these recurrent moments of deep angst about loss – even loss that is years in the past. Suffering doesn't seem to go away completely; it merges with life. One of my participants put it very succinctly, "Suffering never goes away completely, in the sense, the essence of the suffering experience gets so enmeshed within us like salt mixed with dough, that even if one tries to separate the salt or its flavour from the dough, one cannot do it".

The cycle of suffering and healing continues unabated, giving meaning and direction to one's life. Shelton (2000) argues that one's traumatic experiences pave the way to change the person at a deep level. It is often painful, but amazingly

transformational, involving an emerging tenacity giving confidence and courage to fight in the face of vulnerabilities.

This finding is consistent with the Hindu view that life and suffering go hand in hand – as long as there is life, suffering will be. Crisis has been understood as a call for change. Alok Pandey (2001) observed that since the efforts towards alleviation of suffering are in the direction of more or less an adaptation to the same level from where the crisis took off, from where the conflict started, i.e., within the parameters of one's ego, healing would always remain temporary and incomplete.

A consciousness based approach, which would entail a going beyond the scope of the ego's boundary wherein we try to place and understand the suffering experience within the larger perspective - would perhaps lead to lasting and complete healing to manifest. The dualism of healing and suffering would persist within the ego boundaries, but this dualism would cease to be once the ego boundary is transcended and the crisis experience finds a meaningful place in the larger design of one's life.

5. Healing is spontaneous

The quest for peace and well-being is as inherent in humankind as the cycle of inhalation and exhalation of breath. Healing comes naturally to all living beings, be it humans or animal species - it may be understood as being instinctual - as part of one's most basic need for survival. Just as the body has a natural system of healing physical ailments, likewise the mind has its own unique ways of handling life crises.

Who heals our troubled soul is a question which cannot be answered on the basis of positivistic methodologies. It is only when the mind is quiet and we stop struggling to bring about a change that we may get glimpses of the healing agency within, that which works silently to bring us back to life in the face of a trauma. Everyone (almost) recovers and there is nothing esoteric or mystical about it. Our knowledge of this 'silent healer' is obscured by the countless layers of social learning. As one grows and develops into a social being, the ability to heal oneself keeps receding into the background, till a time comes when one is too steeped in the world and its machinations, the person has practically lost all touch with one's innermost recesses from where the healing springs forth spontaneously.

External measures are adhered to for giving relief and finding respite from pain and suffering, but these outside ministrations may be understood as coming under the domain of what we can call ‘palliative healing’. It is palliative in the sense that it is not enduring and need constant support and reinforcement from outside. All soothing words from healors and counselors, from social and emotional support group often work like pain killers. Same is the case with auto-suggestions and positive thinking which takes away the pain of the conscious mind for the time being. Only when we let the natural healing process take over and let our subliminal mind become receptive to healing messages an enduring change will take place. Healing is thus not in our strivings but in allowing this process to take over.

In a few narratives the suffering was so daunting that the narrator could not even begin to fathom the meaning and import of the loss, and coming to terms with such enormous trauma was perhaps not possible for the conscious mind. This may be a kind of situation which overwhelms the person and provides no clue as to how to respond. As eminent cancer surgeon and writer Bernie Siegel (1991) explains, the lulling of the conscious mind serves to awaken the nonconscious healer within us.

Another viewpoint is that we are wired to respond emotionally in ways that will ensure survival enhancing attachments, and the emotional system functions to connect and integrate (Bowlby, 1969). A feeling of confusion and being overwhelmed may also emerge, due to the suddenness and enormity of change that is thrust upon the individual by the painful experience. The complex human system, as described by Guidano (1991), has a tendency to maintain systemic coherence. Siegel (1991) posits that feelings are chemical and can kill or cure. Consequently, healing essentially has to be of the emotions – that part of oneself which is at once spontaneous, genuine, and honest. We don’t yet understand how the body converts healing suggestions to reality. But something in the body hears these messages and knows how to respond to them.

6. Healing comes from within

As one can fathom from the above discussion, healing essentially comes from within. Suffering is not in the event per se, but in the meaning construed of the event. Suffering is in the way an event is understood and made sense of. It is in this exercise of making sense of the event that almost each one who suffers raises the question as to ‘*why me?*’ Why did one become the recipient of such intense suffering? People are more miserable when they do not have a convincing explanation than when they have (Dalal, 2000). When people feel they have an understanding of events, they feel a greater sense of control in dealing with those events. Finding meaning is usually instrumental in finding hope and feeling a sense of agency in coping with loss. One is constantly constructing and reconstructing meanings, and in the process, one is continually constructing and reconstructing oneself. In life crises, this constructive enterprise can be one of the most effective antidotes to depression and loss of hope

It may be stated here that in case of physical ailments treatment may facilitate healing, but it is not the same as psychological healing, because treatment originates outside the individual, whereas *healing comes from within* (Weil, 1996).

Sri Aurobindo (2004) observed that healing is an inner process. No one can help others to overcome their grief and suffering unless one overcomes them in oneself and becomes master of one’s sentiments and reactions.

The Buddhist way of dealing with suffering was by altering conditions internal to the person. As the Buddha himself spoke to his disciples that ‘there are times when you fail, you suffer, you feel you are attacked on every side...people blame you, you are frustrated, the more effort you make the worse the situation becomes, and then you know that its time to stop everything. Its time to go home and take refuge in the island within. If you continue to be on the outside, you will get lost and continue to suffer. Everyone has a hermitage within, very safe, comfortable, cozy, calm. Discover that beautiful island within your self that you may take refuge in every time you suffer.’

Sage Ramana Maharshi (2003) observed that suffering turns the mind inward and eventually draws out the cry from the depths of the soul for the liberating light of true knowledge that would lead to redemption. It is in suffering, that individuals make attempts to transcend the mundane (level of consciousness) and explore and unravel the

uncharted domain of the unconscious. This would eventually rid one from the shackles of ignorance, and consequent suffering.

As the story goes: There was once an argument among the gods over where to hide the secret of life so that men and women would not find it. One god said: Bury it under a mountain; they will never look there. No, the others said, one day they will find ways to dig up mountains and will uncover it. Another said: Sink it in the depths of the ocean; it will be safe there. No, the others objected, humans will one day find ways to plumb the ocean's depths and will find it easily. Finally another god said: Put it inside them; men and women will never think of looking for it there. All the gods agreed, and so that is how the secret of life came to be hidden within us.

7. Healing entails spiritual growth

In the Indian context healing is considered to be essentially a spiritual experience. Adversities in life seemed to bring home the realization that one can exercise little control over such happenings and that there must be some divine power operating. Acceptance of suffering comes rather smoothly for those who trust in the fairness of the Supreme Power. It is paradoxical that when one surrenders one's sense of personal control, one starts feeling less constrained by the circumstances (Kakar, 1991).

From the healing narratives it was observed that suffering became an opportunity to reconnect or re-establish a relationship with the Divine. In the face of crisis, when one felt totally ill-equipped to deal with the situation, and after all outside efforts bore no fruit, almost universally, one turned inward to the Divine.

The basic tenet of all religions and all spiritual disciplines is also to help us find lasting peace and happiness/bliss. Faith and hope which are engendered by all the spiritual disciplines are largely instrumental in facilitating the healing process. Hope seems to be the part of one's survival mechanism and survives in the deeper layers of the nonconscious, even when it is hard to support it at the conscious level.

Spiritual growth is an inescapable aspect of healing, and implicates a changing perspective of oneself and reality, and the unfoldment of an inner intuitive capacity which exists in every human being. Indian spiritual traditions generally view their healing function, both of mind and body, as incidental to and as a byproduct of their main task:

the purification of the mind, the removal of its distortions and illusions, its ignorance. In Buddhist terms, a purified mind is calm (or mindful) and thus a fit receptacle for the flow of a higher, transcendent consciousness. Herein is presumed to lie the true healing of the individual.

The Healing Journey

Healing is a very personal journey for everyone. No two people go through the same experience, nor do they go through the same stages. A traumatic event may totally disorient a person, offsetting his or her existing pattern of living and relating. People in such circumstances need to reorganize their lives and come to terms with the altered reality. Though psychological healing is a total experience, it essentially entails an inner transformation of the person encompassing cognitive, emotional, social and moral reappraisal of the crisis situation. When people approach a healer, a spiritual guide or a guru for finding solace, it is almost necessarily accompanied by a feeling of hope and expectation of a positive development. Local myths, legends and rituals sustain such expectations. A belief in the healer's powers is of immeasurable value in escalating the healing process. An effective healer establishes a direct relationship with the individual's conscious and an indirect relationship with his/her nonconscious (Kakar, 1991). Contact with the nonconscious is established by invoking beliefs and rituals which are mutually shared by the healer and the suffering individual. A healer merely works as a catalyst in building hope and trust and thereby triggering the healing process within the person. All healing is, in this sense, self-healing.

Healing is reconstruction of the crisis situation

The suffering experience is pregnant with feelings of loss, disruption of stability of a predictable world, frustration, agony, pain, a dismemberment of self, and where one has lost all grip over one's life. The first step in the face of such a predicament is to begin by making sense of the crisis event.

When one's senses are sensitized and attuned to seeking answers to life-threatening questions, one's awareness also gets heightened. Looking around oneself, one becomes aware of even greater and more intense suffering of people, which has a

sobering and humbling effect. This comparison and reappraisal enables one to appreciate one's lot and be grateful for what one has.

In the Theravada text there is a story of a mother who approached the Buddha and his disciples. The mother implored the Buddha, whom she believed to be an enlightened being, to take away the pain and agony she was then experiencing from the death of her beloved son. The Buddha responded that, before her pain could be taken away, she would have to perform one task: she would have to go from door to door throughout the city until she had located just one person who had not suffered from the loss of a loved one. The woman hurried away and several days later came back as a changed person. She had not succeeded in her mission; she was not able to locate a single person whose life had not been free from the sorrow accompanying the loss of a loved one. In fact, the more doors she knocked on, the more stories she heard of woe and despair. Finally, she emerged from the confines of her private suffering and realized that no one is free from suffering, and most people are in the same state as herself. With the realization that she was not alone, her pain eased.

What had happened to her was an opportunity for her to appreciate deeply the sufferings of others. Thus, personal tragedy became the realization of a universal experience. It may be reassuring for the individual to realise that suffering makes no discrimination amongst people and that one is not alone in one's pain and there are many others in the same boat. Healing, in this sense, may be understood as a process of "democratizing" suffering (Kakar, 1982), and thereby making it more palatable for the person.

Assigning meaning to suffering often reduces the pain associated with it. In the Indian situation when people could not explain their present suffering on the basis of their deeds of this life, they often sought explanations in the theory of Karma. Such an explanation helped people accept their suffering and sustain their hopes for a better future (Gokhale, 1961, Dalal, 2000, Joshi, 2000). Faith in the theory of Karma also afforded a redeeming angle to their suffering, wherein their suffering was performing the role of a cleanser and lightening their load of bad deeds in this life. This made the pain bearable, and even welcome in some cases. It also helped in reestablishing their dwindling faith in

a just world and a just God. With the revival of this faith in the Divine order of things, the journey ahead for most of the participants became easier to trudge.

Belief in the theory of Karma also facilitated the acceptance of suffering in our studies. Once people accept the inevitability of suffering as a retribution for one's misdeeds in the past, the suffering event somehow loses its earlier potency and intensity. Acceptance offers a way to navigate through life's ups and downs with grace, sometimes with a sense of humor, and consequently helps in providing an understanding of the Larger Picture - one's ultimate goal. Dalal (2000) and Priya (2004) have argued that the acceptance of suffering is a crucial step towards its cognitive reconstruction and the process of healing.

The third aspect of cognitive restructuring is to find positive meaning in the suffering experience. Finding positive meaning may be another route to increasing levels of optimism. Studies (e.g., Agrawal, Dalal, Agrawal & Agrawal, 1994) have documented that finding benefit in adversity is not only predicted by pre-existing levels of optimism but is also predictive of future increases in optimism. Increased optimism, however attained, should translate into an increased ability to find positive meaning and experience positive emotions in daily life.

The Mother (2004) has also said that when you accept that the suffering is for one's growth and is part of the larger design, then one is content, and it is perhaps in this state that healing is spontaneous. Whatever the circumstance, if one is able to look at it as something favourable, it will no longer be unpleasant for you. This acceptance cannot be contrived, forced and superficial but has to come from within. The deeper it comes from the more effective it would be in triggering the healing process.

Healing is working out emotional pain.

The Mother says, "Healing comes not from the head but from the heart" (CWM, 16, p. 19). Since suffering entails hurt emotions, feelings of shame, guilt, etc., where one's predictable meaningful world is threatened and one gets isolated, healing essentially has to be of the emotions.

Emotional pain refers to a feeling of loss and vulnerability, in the face of major life crises. Clinical studies have shown that in many such cases ability to cope with life in

positive and healthier ways is seriously impaired, leading to loneliness, meaninglessness, hopelessness and despair as major consequences. In social terms, emotional pain is a loss of the familial world. Accordingly, the experience of emotional pain is situated in a matrix of meanings, identities and relationships, specific to a particular culture. In the Indian tradition, as Paranjpe (1998) has pointed out, the emphasis is on the self as the experiencer (*bhokta*) of emotions – both as enjoyer and as sufferer. It is the theory of Karma which posits that the *bhokta* must inevitably suffer consequences of bad deeds, just as the rewards of good deeds. The emphasis thus, is on the person, and not on the polarity of negative and positive emotions. Tilak (1915/1971), in his commentary on the Holy Gita, has stated that a person is happy to the degree to which his or her expectations are fulfilled. This stance is closer to the social constructionist view that emotions are ego-constructions within the socially shared interpersonal space, not as necessary consequences of the tragic life event *per se*. Healing entails positive reconstruction of the painful emotions.

To heal, it is important that the individual is able to acknowledge one's disturbing emotions and bring them forth from the deeper layers. This is often a painful exploration of one's deepest thoughts and feelings involved in the traumatic event. When one moves one's disturbing thoughts, feelings, fears, hurts, disappointments and resentments in the socially shared space, one begins to take that negative energy out of one's own system. Siegel (1991) says: *'When you put your feelings outside, you may heal inside. And you will certainly heal your life, if not your disease; for emotional repression prevents the healing system from responding as a unified entity to threats from inside or outside'* (p.188).

Taylor (1997) contends that forgiveness forms the very basis of healing. One needs to courageously go within and feel one's hurt and sadness and grieve one's losses; acknowledge one's failures and mistakes, even when one may feel they were justified or deserved; forgive oneself through the hard and difficult path of self-disclosure and honesty. One can find one's true strength and healing only by acknowledging and accepting one's own humanity, one's frailties, and one's limitations (Dalai Lama, 1992).

The manifestation of emotional healing was sufficiently brought forth in the case of Pragma (Anand, 2005). After her husband's suicide, Pragma immersed herself

completely in her work, and shut herself to all emotions; so much so, that a certain emotional isolation and apathy became a part of her for quite some years. It was during that period of complete emotional withdrawal that while participating in the basic course of 'The Art of Living', without understanding why, she suddenly broke down. It was not a normal breaking down. Pragma shared, that she cried so bitterly, profusely, and so loudly, that she couldn't stop crying for almost fifteen days. It seemed as though all the pressure that had been mounting on her nonconscious and which had blocked the free flow in her inner system, all burst forth with a vengeance, as though a dam had broken free. All the pent up pain, fury, bitterness, frustration, and anguish of several years, as though, got washed away in her tears. Thereafter, feeling buoyant and relieved, Pragma sang bhajans and danced as she had never done before. This was the expression of her inner self which had experienced the release after such a long period.

It may be noted that alleviating problematic negative emotions does not in itself cultivate positive emotions. Positive emotions are more than the absence of negative emotions. The best solutions to problems stemming from negative emotions are ones that capitalize on positive emotions. An important feature of positive emotions is that their effects do not end once suffering is prevented or alleviated. The repercussions of experiencing positive emotions resonate further: positive emotions, when tapped effectively, can optimize health, subjective well-being, and psychological resilience. They undo the effects of negative emotions as well as broaden the thought-action repertoire.

Healing leads to Relational Embeddedness

A disease/loss is a social event in traditional societies. It affects not only the person but also the family and the community and all others associated with that person. All of them are likewise stakeholders and have a role in bringing the person back to better health/being healed. Secondly, any major illness uproots a person from his/her social moorings. It calls into question the earlier mode of interaction and adjustment which a sick/suffering individual had in his/her society. Any kind of suffering redefines one's position and role in the community but also calls for reconnecting the person to the existing social institutions.

People show a tendency to go into their shell and their thought processes become more ego-centric and defensive, and consequently make them more lonely. An increasing number of studies have indicated that the more a person is isolated from the social whole, the less healthy one is likely to be. The implications of this finding are profound. If people without strong social support become sick, then strengthening loving and supporting ties with others may become a means of stimulating the healing system. If separation and loss can lead to impaired health, then attachment and affiliation may help overcome illness. There is some logic in thinking in terms of a “two-way street”, where the psychosocial routes toward illness may bi-directionally lead to the citadel of health and healing. Time after time, one observes the power of enduring marriages, devoted friendships, selfless acts, and indestructible love. One well-chosen utterance, one strongly conveyed belief, one palpable gesture from a friend or loved one often provides the hand that pulls someone from the abyss.

It was observed that many social practices, rituals and activities have an important function of bringing the person back into the relational fold. Recent work in the area of health and healing shows that it is not only power that ailing human beings want, but healing, love, and care. People in need of healing do not desire “clean” therapies, no matter how aesthetically appealing they might be to the physician. Often it is not just medicine but the physician’s touch, words, caring, and love which is equally important (Dossey, 1997).

All participants felt alone in the face of severe crisis. A mixture of feelings emerged en masse, leaving them at best confused and at worst overwhelmed and alarmed. None of them could share their pain with anyone and felt greatly disoriented. Their withdrawal was understandable, for it allowed them time to take grasp of their situation and let its emotional and social consequences sink in. Often in the light of the changed scenario, there was a call on these people to redefine their relationships with themselves, as well as, with others around them.

Nevertheless, those who healed were able to relate with others in similar predicament. Participants gave evidence of empathy, sensitivity and understanding towards others and their suffering; at no point was it felt that they were warped or steeped

in their own woes and problems and made themselves available wherever and whenever they felt their help or presence was needed.

Healing is a movement towards the transcendental

Transcendence implies rising above the worldly knowledge and realizing the presence of a Higher existence. According to Rao (2005), in the major Indian systems of thought transcendence is “movement from the mundane to sublime, from *sansāra* to *nirvāṇa*, or in the Vedānt jargon, from *vyavahārika* to *pārmārthika* states” (p.19). In the mundane sense, it implies transformation of the individual to attain the goal of knowing the truth, becoming objective and rising above sensory distortions due to life conditions.

Transcendence in the present context means that people are able to see their crises from a larger perspective, from a vantage point, and understand it as a meaningful part of a complex matrix. Thus, the personal crisis which appeared too big from the proximal perspective looked smaller when a larger view was taken. This process of shifting from an attached view to distancing oneself from the crisis is in itself therapeutic. One is able to reappraise the traumatic event and fathom the essence of one’s crisis; broaden the boundaries of one’s own-self and thereby transcend and outgrow the unpleasant episode of life to make room for and accommodate newer experiences. Many of the participants in our studies reported such transcendental experiences, which they differently named as mystical, spiritual, or simply as a growth experience.

Thus, the crisis situation hasn’t changed, but the individual experiencing it has, in attitude, orientation, and emphasis. In such a scenario, there is no bitterness, anger, frustration, or complaint. Instead, there is evidence to show that the faith in the goodness of humankind, and hope in the benevolence and justice of the Higher Order, all give credence to the fact that the experience of suffering has not mauled their spirits – rather, they have surfaced from its depths, enriched and wiser.

Another, but not unrelated, aspect which has been emphasized in the scriptures (especially in the Bhakti tradition), is the surrender in one’s guru or God rather than keep fighting to control the course of one’s life events (Muktanand, 1983; The Mother, 2004; Raman Maharshi, 2003). Kakar (1991) terms this as ‘surrender of adulthood’ - renouncing of all adult categories, including rational inquiry. Hundreds of tales and

parables reinforce the mystical, charismatic, divine guru image extolling the disciples to surrender and let the guru take one along through one's suffering. When one surrenders, one reposes uncritical trust and faith in the guru or God who is presumed to know what is good for oneself. In the spiritual tradition surrender is a process of transformation of the individual self (ego) where the sense of self as an agency ceases to exist, as it aligns with the larger Self, wherein suffering loses its potency. Surrender is not a passive giving up but an active process of relinquishing personal control.

As one begins to surrender all conscious and deliberate efforts to make things better, correspondingly, faith in the Higher Order gradually begins to gain ground. To be able to develop this trust that whatever is happening in one's life is part of a Larger Design and is ordained by the Larger Reality, facilitates hope and a restoration of faith in a 'just world/God'. Faith and hope creates a receptivity and preparedness within a person to be amenable to healing messages.

When one is able to confront one's losses and fears, one's pain and incapacities, one acknowledges one's vulnerabilities. This vulnerability is the essence, the process, of human nature. Simply acknowledging the reality of this sense of vulnerability would be a beginning (Fife, 1994). This acknowledgment and acceptance of one's limitations without attempting to raise any defenses, loosens up the blocked flow within one's innermost layers of consciousness. It is a humbling and an elevating experience at the same time. Therein begins the healing process.

Many respondents in our studies had shown such surrender in the face of acute crisis. Pragya's narrative is a good example. She had almost lost her son in a tragic car accident and was battling with life. As she narrates, "*The night the accident took place, I felt that neither money, power, doctors, facilities, nothing mattered at that juncture. Only one thing works here, and that is God...That night I literally handed him (her son) over to God, because even if I had gone and placed all my wealth there, and would have used all the powers of the city, and would have done everything possible...I didn't know whether I could have saved my son.... I was sitting in the night (in the hospital) – I said, 'O God now I have handed him to you – I don't know what is appropriate for me. My heart would wish that my son stays with me but what is right for me, this you decide. If it was in my hands I would spend all my wealth, even if I finish off everything, still I don't*

know whether I will be getting him back or not.... I was sitting alone and praying.... Now You decide what is to be done with him (her son)..."

To conclude, it can be stated that though psychological healing is becoming an increasingly popular area of research, what it really entails is still a matter of debate. This work has attempted to bring clarity about the concept and characteristics of psychological healing on the basis of some empirical work. We still need to know how the term is understood in different cultural contexts and what happens in the process of healing. In spite of a large number of studies the process of self-healing is still an enigma. How do faith, belief and emotions translate in positive mental states, leading to happiness and sense of well-being? These are still perplexing questions in psychological research. Part of the challenge is that of developing appropriate methodologies to understand inner processes culminating in balance, harmony and growth in one's life. The psychology of healing holds a lot of promise and is opening up new vistas of research.

References

- Agrawal, M., Dalal, A.K, Agrawal, R.K. & Agrawal, D.K. (1994). Positive life orientation and psychological recovery of myocardial infarction patients. *Social Science and Medicine*, 38, 125-130.
- Anand, J. (2004). Working through emotional pain: A narrative study of the healing process. *Psychological Studies*, 49, 185-192.
- Anand, J. (2006). Toward a conceptual formulation of psychological healing. *Psychological Studies*, 51(2),
- Anand, J., Srivastava, A., & Dalal, A.K. (2001). Where suffering ends and healing begins. *Psychological Studies*, 46, 114-126.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss, Vol.1*. Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books.
- Dalal, A.K. (2000). Living with a chronic disease : Healing and psychological adjustment in Indian society. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 12, 67-81.
- Dalal, A.K. (in press). Folk Wisdom and Traditional Healing Practices: Some Lessons for Modern Psychotherapies. In M. Cornellison, G. Misra, and S. Verma (Eds.), *Foundations of Indian Psychology*. New Delhi: Pearson.

- Dossey, L. (1997). *Healing words: The power of prayer and the practice of medicine*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Fife, B.L. (1994). The conceptualization of meaning in illness. *Social Science and Medicine*, 38(2), 309-316.
- Gibran, K. (1980). *The Prophet*. London: William Heinemann.
- Gokhale, B.G. (1961). *Indian thought throughout the ages: A study of some dominant concepts*. Mumbai: Asia Publishing House.
- Guidano, V. (1991). Affective change events in a cognitive therapy system. In J. Safran and L. Greenberg (Eds.), *Emotion, psychotherapy, and change* (pp. 50-79). New York: Guilford Press.
- Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and recovery*. New York: Basic Books.
- Horowitz, M. J. (1976). *Stress response syndromes* (2nd ed.). Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Joshi, P.C. (2000). Relevance and utility of traditional medical systems (TMS) in the context of a Himalayan tribe. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 12(1), 5-30.
- Kakar, S. (2003). Psychoanalysis and Eastern Spiritual Traditions. *Journal of Analytic Psychology*, 48, 659-678.
- Kakar, S. (1982). *Shamans, Mystics & Doctors*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kakar, S. (1991). *The analyst and the mystic*. New Delhi: Viking.
- Kleinman, A. (1980). *Patients and healers in the contexts of culture*. California: University of California Press.
- Kleinman, A. (1988). *The illness narratives*. USA: Basic Books.
- Pandey, Alok (2001). Practical aspects of integral psychotherapy. In: Matthijs Cornelissen (ed.) *Consciousness and Its Transformation*. Pondicherry: SAICE
- Paranjpe, A.C. (1984). *Theoretical psychology: The meeting of east and west*. N.Y.: Plenum Press.
- Paranjpe, A.C. (1998). *Self and identity in modern psychology and Indian thought*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Priya, Ravi Kumar (2004). Survivor's suffering and healing amidst changing socio-economic forces in two years of post-earthquake Kachchh. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 16, 41-60.

- Raman Maharishi (2003). *Talks with Ramana Maharshi, three volumes in one*.
Tiruvannamalai: Ramanasramam. (First published 1955).
- Rao, K.R. (2005). Scope and substance of India psychology. In K.R.Ramkrishna. Rao and Sonali B. Marwaha (eds.). *Towards a spiritual psychology: Essays on Indian psychology*. New Delhi: Samvad Indian Foundation.
- Shelton, M.M. (2000). *Guidance from the darkness*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Siegel, B.S. (1991). *Peace, love and healing*. London: Arrow Books.
- Swami Muktananda (1983). *The Perfect Relationship*. Ganeshpuri: Gurudev Siddha Peth.
- Taylor, E. (1997). *A psychology of spiritual healing*. Pennsylvania: Chrysalis Books.
- The Dalai Lama (1992). *Worlds in harmony*. Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press.
- The Mother. (2004). *Suffering: Its cause and cure. Compilation from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.
- Weil, A. (1996). *Spontaneous healing*. London: Warner Books.