

THE
EVOLUTION
OF THE SOUL
THROUGH SERVICE

Born to Serve

by Susan S. Trout, Ph.D.

WITH A FOREWORD BY HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

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Poem by Uvanuk from *The Enlightened Heart* by Stephen Mitchell.
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Personal stories in this book have been changed
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*S*TAGE FOUR

The Wounded Healer

***B**y age eighteen I decided I wanted to live a life of selfless service. Throughout college and work life, I had multiple opportunities to serve. At age twenty-one I started the first speech pathology program for adults with aphasia in a nursing home. I moved to Alaska where I taught the deaf and worked with children and adults with brain injuries. Later, in San Francisco, I conducted research with those suffering brain trauma. At age thirty-three and for fourteen years thereafter, I served as a professor and first woman chairperson of a university medical sciences department.*

No matter where I worked or in what capacity, I failed to experience the joy and happiness I expected from being of service. Why had the helping profession I had chosen resulted in an unfulfilling life? I thought I must need more schooling, more self-help groups, or a more responsible job. I began to suspect I had chosen my profession, not so much because of my concern for others, but because of my concern about my own psychology, neurology, and spirituality.

DESCRIPTION: THE WOUNDED HEALER

Stage Four, the Wounded Healer, represents one final attempt to find meaning, purpose, and validation in the outside world. Instead of looking for happiness in materialism, work, causes, or institutions as in the first three stages, individuals search for meaning through personal and professional relationships. They move from serving a world that needs saving and correcting to serving with the hope of meeting their emotional needs. Outside appearances to the contrary, the Wounded Healer's underlying motivation for service is to be rescued rather than to rescue.

The primary characteristic of Wounded Healers is to give to others what they want for themselves. Their inner, often unconscious, belief is that "If I do this for others, it will happen for me." Many enter helping professions, marriage, and other partner relationships hoping to find a missing or lacking part within themselves. This creates personal and work relationships fraught with expectations and dependencies.

Characteristically, Wounded Healers also compartmentalize learning to a greater, more extreme degree than those in the first three stages. Wounded Healers apply what they have learned in one aspect of life but not in another. For example, a person may present an understanding and compassionate *persona* in the work place but be intolerant and unforgiving in the home. In going through the preceding evolutionary stages, the Wounded Healer accumulates vast knowledge and skill but has not yet integrated these in a way that impacts their daily lives. Even those who teach social, emotional, and spiritual skills do not incorporate what they teach into all aspects of their own lives.

Persons in this stage have internalized the work ethic, mastering methods and techniques and using their intellect in problem-

STATEMENT:
*If I help others, I
will get my
emotional needs
met.*

**CORE
LEARNING:**
*Healthy
boundaries*

SALIENT FEAR:
I am not enough.

PRIMARY GIFT:
Generosity

**TRANSITIONAL
SHIFT:**
*Surrender of
self-deception for
self-responsibility*

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solving. They have taken an important step towards standing alone, not wanting others, work, or religion to define their worth. Yet they still look to relationships to make them whole and complete.

I moved into Stage Four in my early twenties when I became disillusioned with the strictness and rigidity of the church's teachings. I wanted to be independent and unrestrained by institutionally imposed restrictions. I sought to fulfill my life's mission by developing innovative training and service programs in private organizations that imposed fewer strictures and provided support for creativity. In each of my work situations, I did my best to do what I felt was right and good, hoping that eventually I would be happy and content with life. I stayed in the Wounded Healer stage for almost twenty-five years.

I began to realize that I was no Wonder Woman who could perform miracles and make everyone happy. I could not feel love and compassion for other people when I saw them as needing help; I hid from myself my own need to help them. My need to have them need me and to feel I could affect their lives arose from a superior/inferior viewpoint separating me from my own humanity and from that of others. On one hand, I experienced my life as rich with inspiration, energy, and creativity. On the other hand, I felt confused, bewildered, and at times overcome by sheer terror. I was not enough.

Crises caused by broken relationships, abandonment issues, loss of identity, betrayal, loss of financial security, and lack of achievement provide the necessary catalyst prompting Wounded Healers to examine the quality of their lives. They usually do not seek outside support until such a crisis occurs. If they choose not to seek support or do not have sufficient psychological strength to confront and work through a crisis, they usually continue to look outward for their validation. They either remain caught in their

suffering or return to an earlier stage of awareness. They may become depressed and suicidal, particularly if they cannot see any viable choices.

The primary gift of those in Stage Four is their generosity. While seeking to meet their own needs through relationships, they endeavor to make a difference in the world by assisting others. They bring forward the gifts of the first three stages and are hard-working, competent, sensitive, and motivated to bring about constructive change in the health and well-being of others. They are socially and culturally conscious. They serve their communities. They care deeply about the well-being of humanity and are generous helpers in the world.

When I first met Christina, she was in her early forties and had worked as a therapist for twenty years. During that time, she had counseled hundreds of clients and led many therapy groups. Now she described herself as physically and mentally exhausted with “no more to give.” She was also unable to leave an unhealthy relationship.

Christina’s personal history made it clear she had selected a profession that related to her unmet emotional needs. She explained, “My family was very troubled. By the time I was ten years old, my mother had been hospitalized several times for depression, and my father stayed away from home and buried himself in his work. As a youngster, I became intrigued with psychology and wanted to help others. I looked to the field of psychology to provide me with insights and direction about my own overwhelming and bewildering emotions. I wanted to help others in situations similar to mine and so was trained to work with those having a history of emotional and physical abuse.” Christina added that she had always wanted a romantic relationship that would give her a sense of being cared for physically and emotionally.

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Instead, she repeatedly selected partners who were emotionally aloof and who did not benefit from her attempts to help them.

Christina's professional training focused exclusively on diagnosis and treatment based on the pathology of emotional and psychological health. Her training did not provide a framework for viewing a client wholistically from a comprehensive physical, mental, neurological, educational, and spiritual perspective. She counseled others solely through the window of their emotions. At no time did she consciously link her own emotional history and its needs and concerns with those of her clients. Christina admitted, "I have become good at what I do. People seem to gain value from my work with them. Yet I feel I give and give and gain nothing in return. I am becoming increasingly discouraged and distraught. I must need further education about newer and more effective methods."

With renewed enthusiasm, Christina began her study of other methods. She went back to school. She searched for answers that would help her understand the nature of the human mind and result in helping her clients and improving her own emotional state. Christina was in the Wounded Healer stage of awareness of service.

A similar phenomenon can occur within the family. Julianna, an established writer, once shared that she experienced the Wounded Healer stage early in her marriage to Ben. When she met Ben, he was a widower with two young children who was struggling to make a living and maintain a semblance of family life.

Recently divorced and at a career juncture, Julianna felt she could fill her emptiness and give her life definition by providing a stable home life for Ben and his children. She would find herself by saving them.

As time went on and the perfect picture of family did not

develop as planned, Julianna felt a tremendous sense of failure. Wounding herself by failing to meet her self-imposed expectations, she became depressed and felt unloved. She feared that if she could not meet their needs, she was nothing and had no reason to exist. Furthermore, she feared someone would discover she had failed. As she became more and more depressed, she projected her sense of failure outward, deciding that Ben and the children were at fault for not wanting to be helped.

Julianna was in the fourth stage of awareness of service. Finally, feeling herself sliding into another cycle of depression, she realized she could choose to be responsible for her perceptions and feelings. With humility, she confronted her woundedness. Increasingly, Julianna accepted all parts of herself, the shadow and the light. As she opened toward herself, she also opened herself to her connection with the Absolute. She has subsequently continued her spiritual journey and has worked toward creating a healthy marriage and family life.

An imbalance between giving and receiving creates an obstruction in flow of the Life Force. This obstruction builds severe stress within the psyche, causing fragmentation. The psyche eventually collapses when it becomes so fragmented that it can no longer hold the strain of opposing energies. An identity crisis follows, involving the purpose and intent of the psyche itself. An existential question emerges, “What is the true meaning of my life? Not, what did I think it was to be, but what is it truly?”

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PROCESS OF THE WOUNDED HEALER

STATE OF THE SELF

As in the Work Ethic and Missionary Attitude stages, Wounded Healers often lead well-ordered lives and are contributors to the

Having invested considerable time, energy, and money in searching to have their emotional needs met in personal and work relationships, they become greatly disillusioned when this does not happen.

community. Their view of life is physically, materially, and psychologically based. They develop *personas* that match social expectations of their roles as parents, professionals, coworkers, or partners in relationships. In the more private areas of their life, they are often fearful and despairing.

Over time, tensions increase dramatically between the outer life and inner reality. Having invested considerable time, energy, and money in searching to have their emotional needs met in personal and work relationships, they become greatly disillusioned when this does not happen. Discovering the lack of meaning and purpose in their lives, they feel unworthy and experience self-hatred. They are vulnerable to having their views questioned or challenged because they lack a strong sense of self. Life is not what they thought it would be.

WORLD VIEW

During the first three stages, one has been building a world view aligned with certain outside standards. First, the world is chaotic and in need of ordering. Then, the world is ignorant and in need of correction. In Stage Three, the world is helpless and in need of saving. With these standards defining one's world view, one can relate to others through action and through wanting a world that is better for others than it has been for oneself. By Stage Four, individuals have discovered that the world they have seen so far has not fulfilled any of the emptiness or need for purpose they experience inside themselves. Still seeing a polarized world of we/they and right/wrong, they begin to believe that other people have answers they do not have and that they can get what these people have through relationship with them. The world becomes divided between those perceived as having full vessels and those perceived as having empty vessels.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

This stage is a continuation of the attempt to find God in the outside world rather than within oneself. One looks to relationships, not to God, to meet one's needs. Wounded Healers have acknowledged that causes, institutions, and organized religion do not hold the answers to spiritual unfoldment; they now seek answers through psychology and relationships. Having taken a detour into relationships as a way to find meaning in life, they realize they remain spiritually unaware.

Those in this stage may yet return to their attachments to the physical and psychological worlds before finally committing to seeing life as a spiritual journey. They may also return to an earlier religious tradition, hoping that the spiritual journey will be easier if they do so. Vulnerable to looking to others to meet their spiritual needs, they can be susceptible to joining spiritual traditions or organizations with charismatic leaders who misuse power.

Because of the intensity of their emotional pain, prayer is important to Wounded Healers. Although prayers still tend to be petitionary in nature, they serve as a meaningful connection to God. Through this connection, they begin a search for another way to view themselves and their relationship to God.

PREDOMINANT SHADOW ISSUES

Shadow issues of Wounded Healers involve repeated attempts to seek psychological completion through relationship. Because they have difficulty differentiating their own needs from the needs of others, they become enmeshed in the physical and psychological boundaries of others, not knowing where they end and the other person begins.

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PROJECTION

Wounded Healers frequently misuse personal power by intruding on the boundaries of others. They do this by projecting onto others what they believe to be missing within themselves. In this way they give responsibility for their feelings and emotions to others, thereby abdicating self-responsibility and personal power. In doing this, they exemplify their belief that “You have what I don’t have. Therefore, I can get what I don’t have from you.” When the other person fails to give them what they want, they feel betrayed and abandoned. Rather than recognizing that they have actually rejected their inner strength, they blame the other person. This blame usually takes the form of anger and demand for change.

Wounded Healers are attached to the belief that happiness lies in relationships. They are certain that relationships will provide them with what they need if only they find the right one. They become attached to a never-ending search for the perfect friend, partner, coworker, or spouse. They are attached to their concept of what a relationship should look like, which often involves exclusivity and expectations of certain behaviors. Once they find someone who seems to meet their criteria, they might become possessive and demanding.

Another way Wounded Healers abdicate personal power is by believing that “If I give you the nurturance and support I need, I will meet my own need for nurturance and support.” This is giving to get. Because they have exaggerated expectations of what they should receive in return, others can rarely meet their needs. When this disappointment occurs, the giver feels drained, disillusioned, and angry.

Because they experience their own needs as being met through their focus on the needs of others, they defend against receiving

help. They see themselves as needing only to give and not to receive. Additionally, because of their need to be needed and therefore to be the giver, they do not recognize the gifts of others. By the end of this stage, Wounded Healers have fully developed this *persona* or way of presenting themselves in the world.

DENIAL

Wounded Healers are caring and responsible people who dedicate themselves to helping others while evading the need to attend to their own inner work. They therefore serve through the veil of their “unfinished business”—all that is incomplete, unfaced, and unacknowledged within themselves. Their denial is often so great that they live in fear that others will see their inner state or will discover the facts of their personal history. To hide themselves from themselves and from the world, they erect barriers by being in control of the results of their work and in charge of the lives of others. They earnestly believe they can bypass their inner work on behalf of the needs of others, as though they are exempt from or beyond the consequences of their own unresolved emotional pain.

Wounded Healers are willing to see service as having educational and human advantages in that it provides opportunities to learn from and about others. They expect others, however, to do what they themselves have not done: integrate intellectual knowledge and experiential wisdom into daily life. Their level of willingness and ability to apply what they learn in their own lives determines the competence of their service. By not engaging in their own inner work, they limit the potential for healing in those they serve. One can support another’s potential for healing only if one experiences that potential within oneself. One would not seek support for addictions, for example, from someone who

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has not faced and to some degree healed the cause of his own addictions. Wounded Healers tend to teach what they *need* to learn rather than what they *have* learned.

They expect others, however, to do what they themselves have not done: integrate intellectual knowledge and experiential wisdom into daily life.

NEGLECT

The gap between knowledge and its application eventually becomes so great that Wounded Healers may experience the mental and physical exhaustion of burnout. Burnout often leads to an existential crisis in which one questions the quality, integrity, and meaning of life. Wounded Healers recognize they can no longer continue the neglect of their own well-being while in relationship with others or while in service.

MODE OF SERVICE

Wounded Healers have a strong sense of **duty** and responsibility towards others and are willing to set themselves aside for the good of family and community. Through discipline, they reach their personal and work goals through well-developed strong, skillful, and good will. Values, ethics, and standards are important to them.

On Maimonides' continuum of giving, Wounded Healers commonly give significantly before being asked. They also give without knowing to whom they are giving, although they want recipients to know their identity. Acknowledgment and appreciation of their giving meet the Wounded Healer's emotional needs.

Wounded Healers willingly engage in good works and often expand their work to a global level. They feel a deep connection with all beings, sentient and insentient. To them, life itself is about giving, loving, and doing. Their *dharma* is to practice peace and service in the world. They expand their sense of duty to include a spiritual practice and an active devotional life.

Wounded Healers practice **charity** as an expression of compassion and unconditional love. Sensitive to the needs and suffering of others, they attempt to provide quality service. They willingly involve themselves personally with those they serve. Through facing the suffering of others, they begin to face their own attitudes about suffering. They turn caring for others into action. They strive to give the right thing in the right amount at the right time and for the right reason.

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TRANSITIONING TO STAGE FIVE: HEALING THE HEALER

The discovery that one can never receive self-validation through a relationship with another person can be so emotionally devastating it results in feelings of abandonment by the world and by God. Typically, a significant loss in life, such as loss of health, job, spouse, or other family member, triggers this realization. The ensuing crisis propels one into considerable emotional distress, confusion, and perplexity, especially if one resists the process of new growth. The outside world offers no relief to the pain; nothing and no one has answers. A struggle ensues between believing and not believing that true strength arises from within. Withdrawing projections and taking responsibility for them requires confrontation of hidden emotional pain.

The transition to Stage Five typically occurs between the ages of thirty-five and fifty as a significant crisis of personal identity and life purpose. This crisis signals a psychological and spiritual readiness to redirect outwardly focused energies inward. To achieve this change, the old must crumble and the new must be built. An intense inner upheaval and disorientation accompanied by a sense of urgency characterizes this death and rebirthing process.

The realization that they have thoroughly exhausted all pos-

The transition to Stage Five typically occurs between the ages of thirty-five and fifty as a significant crisis of personal identity and life purpose.

sibility of finding resolution and contentment outside themselves accompanies this Stage Four crisis. Because identification with and attachment to the body, the material world, and relationships are so strong, they have great difficulty accepting without question that their true strength lies within. Initially, this truth may induce the fear of the unknown enhanced by the mistaken belief that it means they must withdraw from the world, leaving behind all they love. At this point some people experience being frozen by two questions: “Who will I be?” and “More importantly, who will be with me?” They find comfort in knowing that living from a place of inner strength means staying in the world while expressing the depth and richness of shared humanity.

Basically, this particular identity crisis occurs because of intense inner conflict created by the widening gap between the knowledge known and the knowledge applied. “I know that and will use what I know” opposes “I know that and I will not use what I know.” The psyche becomes severely stressed by the demand to keep such extremely disparate energies in place because its natural inclination is to move towards balance and wholeness without ambivalence. Most people experience the psychic stress as physical and mental exhaustion and as depression.

Out of their fear of the unknown, Wounded Healers desperately try to maintain the stability of their lives. This approach creates more inner conflict and outer stress. They finally reach a point where their inability to control the chaos of circumstances humbles them into a sincere quest. At this point, they are willing to begin examining the quality and integrity of their inner and outer lives and ponder their purpose and mission.

Because they need considerable energy to do the necessary inner work to bring about this transformational change, they often require temporary retreat from the outer world. Focusing

inward means reviewing one's life, exploring options, questioning beliefs, and allowing the healing process to unfold. Patiently, through this process, they commit to the unknown, to wholeness, and to the integration of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual parts of the self. Finally, they recognize and accept the self-deception of trying to meet their needs through work or institutions or personal and professional relationships.

Willingness instigates and fuels this venture into the unknown. Only as they are willing to surrender the need to control are they free to explore another way to live in the world. They break free from conditioning and begin to question every belief and attitude as they become responsible for what they think, do, and say.

Whether or not they consciously recognize it, the impetus to change is a direct reflection of the soul's readiness to reveal more of its true destiny. Attaining self-responsibility for their actions and reactions leads to inner freedom and gives the gift of conscious choice. Rather than being buffeted by life circumstances, they can choose to use them as opportunities to learn and grow. As they learn about the soul's true nature, they awaken to their destiny. They become vibrantly and enthusiastically alive.

To move out of the Wounded Healer stage, one must allow this preconceived structure of one's personal world to collapse. That world view is no longer compatible with one's emotional and spiritual evolution. Rather than look to the world to give one security, confidence, and equanimity, one begins to look within. The world view now must be undone if the new is to emerge.

During this time, every belief about the meaning of life stands ready for review and challenge. Their denial will be exposed to themselves and others. All hidden motivations for service must be examined and corrected. Afraid of losing control and out of

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pride, they can initially resist finding and accepting help from others. Humility finally allows them to acknowledge their neglect of spiritual development and to connect to their inner strength.

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SUPPORT FOR STAGE FOUR

Those who pass through the Wounded Healer stage are ready to seriously begin their inner work. An intense period of personal growth and healing begins. They now make a commitment to their wholeness, the integration of all parts of self—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Transpersonal psychological approaches, including depth psychology, psychosynthesis, metaphysics, and mind-body-spirit disciplines, are useful as are wholistic and alternative approaches. It is helpful to refer to philosophical and psychological frameworks when questioning and contemplating one's beliefs. This includes exploring a deeper spiritual dimension to life within both Eastern and Western traditions. It also includes recognizing the many gifts in their lives and their shadow's hidden potentials awaiting realization.

Individuals in this powerful time of transition benefit from an in-depth examination of their personal and work relationships. Three major kinds of support are helpful in bridging from Stage Four to Stage Five:

- supportive exploration of co-dependency and boundary issues,
- support and direction while accepting the self-deception they have engaged in using relationships to meet their emotional needs, and
- ongoing support in inner healing work as they
 - explore options

- question lifelong beliefs by reviewing their lives and their motivations for choosing their work, and
- allow the healing process to unfold as they identify areas of unfinished business.

Cultivating willingness and patience is important because of the depth and breadth of self-examination and inner work that lie ahead. For purposes of encouragement and co-sharing of information and experience, individuals profit from being in the company of others engaged in a similar transition.

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