



für köln



Wounded Soul

Brochure for those touched
by war and human rights violations

With the friendly support of the
European Union /
Commission on Human Rights



Therapy Centre for
Victims of Torture

Wounded souls – Brochure for those touched by war and human rights violations

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Who has written this brochure and why?

We have written this brochure for you because maybe you are personally touched by the mentioned crises, or maybe you are a mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandfather, grandmother, son, daughter, neighbor or friend of such a person.

Through our work at the Therapy Centre for Victims of Torture in Cologne, we are trying to help people who have lived through horrible experiences caused by human rights abuses in their home country or while fleeing, and who are facing further difficulties here in Germany. We have been dedicated to this work for more than 30 years.

We have listened to and learned from the people who have come to us, and together we have gone through a lot.

We would like to share our experiences of our work with you through this brochure, and we hope that we can also help you in this way.

Wounded souls speak their own language

We all know that not only our body can be hurt through disease, but also a person's soul.

After a period of oppression, of war and of an uncertain future, a person's soul is oftentimes wounded.

Horrible experiences are not perceived the same way by everyone, each person reacts differently and tries to find his own way to deal with such events. In addition, each culture has different ways to deal with situations of extreme stress and crisis.

But one thing remains the same for all people and cultures: Each person and each soul has its own memory and its individual »language«. This »language« of the soul is familiar to most people. In times of crisis, it can be an attempt of the soul to help, strengthen and cleanse itself. Often, this can be achieved. But it can also happen that this cry for help is turned outwards. It is not always easy to understand and adhere to the »language« of a hurt soul – whether it's our own or those of others.

When does such a cry for help from the soul take place?

- When a person has suffered a shock.
- When a person finds himself under great pressure to master his daily life, after having experienced horrible situations and not having had time to regenerate sufficiently after these crises.
- When a person, maybe without even noticing, surpasses his own abilities, for example thinking that *»everything must belong to the past, I must focus on the future.«* The person tries to forget, to the extent that the past is not even allowed to exist anymore.
- When a person does not have anyone to talk to about his experiences, or when he does not want to speak so as not to burden someone else.

How can one recognize in oneself or in someone else that the wounded soul is speaking its own language?

Each person and each soul has its own and individual language.

Oftentimes, the following signs are indications of a wound in the soul:

- **Sleeping disorders:** troubles falling asleep or staying asleep; fear of sleeping in the dark
- **Nightmares**
- **Compulsion to worry:** either about the past, the loss of people, the loss of relationships with them, the loss of material possessions, the loss of past abilities and past life situations. Constant worrying and insecurity in current situations.
- **Nervousness:** the person is easily irritated, turns mad easily or feels completely defeated due to minor things.
- **Fears:** Fear of daily chores and tasks, constant fear that something could happen to family members, panic attacks caused by certain situations, sounds, smells or without a recognizable reason.
- **Heightened startle response**
- **Crying, trembling**
- **Memories:** some experiences or even whole time periods from the past are completely forgotten. Some people do everything possible to avoid coming into contact with something from the past.

Sometimes, horrible memories (which can be reactivated by exterior and even minor things) can suddenly become very close and seem as though they are being relived again.

- **Concentration problems:** even simple things cannot be remembered while learning, accomplishing daily tasks, or working.
- **Diminished interest and affect:** for life in general or for certain things and activities; for oneself and

other people, for family members or even for one's own husband or wife.

- **A changed feeling of self-worth:** *»I feel completely different from before«; «Before, something like this would have never happened to me«; »My current life is like a dream, not real at all«; »I'm not worth anything«, etc.*
- **Feeling of isolation:** *»I feel very far away«; »I feel completely different compared to all the other people«; »No one can help me«, etc.*
- **Mistrust:** it becomes difficult to trust others, even those that one has trusted before.
- **Fear of being or turning crazy**
- **Feeling of being dirty, guilty, or at fault**
- **Hopelessness:** the feeling that life is senseless and that it won't change; thoughts about how to end one's life; nothing can create substantial happiness; everything seems difficult, burdensome and lacking objectives.

The wounded soul can also use the body for help in speaking out:

- Headaches
- Stomach/intestinal problems
- Gynecological problems
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Joint and back pain
- Feeling of tightness or pressure in the chest area

- Respiratory problems: the feeling of not being able to get enough air
- Heart problems: heart racing, heart beating or stitches in the chest
- Frequent infections
- Weight loss
- Feeling of only being able to survive with drugs or alcohol

Children and their souls can also express themselves as we have described here.

But in addition to this, they may show more signs, including:

- Behaving as if they were younger, forgetting what had already been acquired
- Urinating or defecating in their clothes or bed
- Showing no interest in playing; or only wanting to play
- Not wanting or being able to learn
- Becoming very attached, or becoming rebellious against what adults demand
- Stealing
- Lying
- Having difficulties with other children
- Behaving differently than before, for example more serious, more reserved, more aggressive, more closed

What can you do – for yourself and for others?

We know from our experiences that all self-help efforts of the wounded soul are normal, even if they are

hard to endure. Everything we have mentioned up to now is a »normal« reaction to »un-normal« situations and experiences. Each person finds his own way to help his wounded soul if the language of the soul is taken seriously.

From our experience, there are similarities in that which helps most people and which strengthens the healing powers of the soul:

■ **Speaking helps:** Conversations about everything that burdens you, about what you worry, about what you dream, what you wish for, about what you brings you pleasure. Conversations should not be forced but offered. Look for conversation partners that are trustworthy and search for or create a group in which you can discuss anything.

■ **Normality helps:** everything that is »normal«, so for example a good and cared for body and appearance; small daily activities that bring you pleasure; a good daily rhythm; planning from day to day; daily contacts for example in the neighborhood or while shopping; a normal social life, for example celebrating birthdays, acquiring small new abilities.

■ **Rituals* help:** these can be small daily rituals in order to think, to take time for oneself (and even if they are just 20 minutes), or to spend time with a person held dear or to have time for a daily or weekly healing conversation. They can also be big rituals that you may plan and take part in with other people, for example to mourn and to accept the passing on of a loved one, or

** With rituals we mean a relatively definite order of behaviors that one repeats consistently or in situations of crises. This can be a small sequence that one engages in repeatedly individually or with one's family. This can also be structured sequences by the community, for example for burials or festive days.*

to celebrate the start of a new time period or a new home.

■ **Creativity helps:** this includes very different kinds of creativity, for example baking a cake, picking out clothes, drawing a picture, singing a song or a simple text, playing with children, handwork – anything that brings about such a satisfying feeling of creating something, of achieving something, of expressing something.

■ **Patience helps:** Wounded souls need their own time. Sometimes you may think that everything lies long ago in the past and that you should now again be like before – this can be expecting too much and does not help the self-healing powers.

■ **For Children helps:** a reliable, structured daily routine, the possibility to play with other children and to learn; the possibility to talk with a reliable person to whom a bond exists, and to find the courage to express their experiences, worries and wishes.

When should you seek or advise professional help?

We know that many people think that they should deal with their experiences relatively quickly and without professional help. But keep in mind that you and your family have perhaps had experiences that you could have not imagined before, and that you and many other people from your home region have passed a period of oppression and great crises, and that maybe your future is now also burdened or uncertain.

What you might be searching for, or what you might advise to others, is professional help, in order to support the self-healing powers of your soul.

You should not hesitate to advise or to seek professional help if:

- You have the impression that the above-mentioned points to support the self-healing process are not helping at all or not enough.
- You are especially disturbed by a change or a reaction that you have observed in yourself or in others – this includes very diverse behavior, among others increased alcohol consumption
- You observe in yourself or in others the presence of a great distaste for life, and/or suicidal ideas.
- You have physical/ bodily symptoms. These should be checked out by a doctor – even if they may be part of the »language of the soul«. Only in this way will you know if you also need medical treatment for the physical symptoms.

We hope that our brochure can help you and those who are important to you. We wish you all the best for your future.

