



Brain Science, Psychological Trauma, and the God Who Is with Us, Part II: The Processing Pathway for Painful¹ Experiences and the Definition of Psychological Trauma

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Acknowledgments: This material has been developed in consultation with Dr. E. James Wilder. I want to thank him for contributing much valuable information, many important suggestions, and many helpful corrections.

I. Pre-introduction: The purpose of this “pre-introduction” is to provide a summary of the developmental neuropsychology and other foundational concepts that are necessary for understanding this discussion of psychological trauma and the processing pathway for painful experiences.²

Psychological/spiritual maturity skills: As a person develops physically, she encounters many physical skills that she must master in order to thrive physically. For example, she must learn to coordinate her feet and legs and trunk in the complex skills of walking and running; she must learn to coordinate the movements of her fingers and thumbs in the many complex skills of manipulating objects with her hands; she must learn to coordinate the movements of her teeth, tongue, lips, and vocal cords in the complex skill of talking;...etc. These are physical skills that you learn during the process of physical development – skills that you learn as you grow in physical maturity. Mastering these physical skills is an important part of maturing physically. Similarly, as a person develops psychologically/spiritually, she encounters many psychological/spiritual skills that she must master in order to thrive psychologically/spiritually. For example, she must learn to handle painful emotions – to stay with painful emotions, to think and behave appropriately while feeling painful emotions, and to get back to joy from painful emotions; she must learn to be aware of and care for her own needs; she must learn to be aware of and care for the needs of others;...etc. These are psychological/spiritual skills that you learn during the process of psychological/spiritual development – skills that you learn as you grow in psychological/spiritual maturity. Mastering these psychological/spiritual skills is an important part of maturing psychologically/spiritually.

When checking to see whether this theory fits your experience, it is important to remember that the subjective experience of using most of these skills is more like the subjective experience of walking than the subjective experience of doing long division. You can be aware of and understand these skills with your logical, analytical, linguistic left hemisphere neurological circuits; but the actual skill is not learned by or carried in your left prefrontal cortex, and

¹ Although this essay focuses on how we process painful experiences, the processing pathway discussed here is actually the processing pathway for all experiences.

² Many of these concepts are discussed in much more detail in the THRIVE conferences and THRIVE training material. For additional information regarding THRIVE conferences and THRIVE training material, visit the THRIVE website at www.thrivetoday.org.

therefore does not *feel, subjectively*, like a logical, analytical, language-based skill.³ You can have a logical, analytical, language-based understanding of walking, but this left hemisphere understanding is not what actually enables you to walk. The subjective experience of most of these psychological/spiritual maturity skills is very similar. You can be aware of them and understand them with your logical, analytical, linguistic left hemisphere circuits, but the actual skills are not learned by, or carried in, your left prefrontal cortex. In fact, most of the time we use these skills so smoothly and intuitively that our logical, analytical, linguistic left hemisphere is hardly even aware of them.

When checking to see whether this theory fits your experience, it is also important to remember that we learn some of the most important psychological/spiritual maturity skills very early in childhood, so that we do not have any conscious autobiographical memory of the actual learning process. This is another way that these maturity skills are more like walking than long division – you have conscious autobiographical memory for learning how to do long division, but not for learning how to walk.

Biological/psychological/spiritual capacity: As described in Part I, when we refer to the capacity of a physical system, we are referring to “how much can it hold?” or “how much can it carry?” The capacity of a bucket refers to how much liquid it can hold before overflowing, the capacity of a bridge refers to how much weight can travel across it before it collapses, and the capacity of an electrical circuit refers to how much current it can carry before blowing a fuse or burning out components. And when we refer to biological/psychological/spiritual capacity, we are referring to the capacity of the person’s biological brain, non-biological mind, and spirit – we are referring to how much biological, psychological, and spiritual intensity a person can handle before some part of his combined brain-mind-spirit system “blows a fuse” and begins to malfunction or disconnect.

Factors that could contribute to strong *biological brain capacity* would include appropriate organization of the brain resulting from healthy neurological development, balanced body chemistry resulting from regular exercise and a healthy diet, absence of injury or disease, and genetic strengths, such as high intelligence and strong emotional processing hardware; and biological stressors that could contribute to the overall load on the system would include things like lack of sleep, hunger, physical pain, any illness or injury that affects the brain, and intoxication with any chemical that impairs brain function. Factors that could contribute to strong *mind capacity* would include healthy psychological development, strong psychological maturity skills, a rich store of accurate and coherent knowledge, and relational connection to a supportive community; and psychological stressors that could contribute to the overall load on the system would include things like negative emotions, such as fear and shame, intense psychological stressors, such as complex decisions where errors result in costly consequences, and traumatic memories that are currently active. Factors that could contribute to strong *spiritual capacity* would include synchronization with Jesus, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, a rich store of spiritual truth, and relational connection to a spiritual community; and spiritual stressors that could contribute to the overall load on the system would include things like truth-based guilt from unconfessed sin, spiritual alienation from persistent willful disobedience, and harassment from demonic spirits.

³ For those of you who are already familiar with the five levels of brain function, yes, these are left prefrontal cortex level 5 circuits and left prefrontal cortex level 5 skills.

A very important point to remember is that each component of the brain-mind-spirit system affects the others. For example, if you are sleep deprived, malnourished, and intoxicated, these biological factors will also affect your mind and spirit. If your psychological development was dysfunctional, you have poor psychological maturity skills, and you are anxious and confused, these psychological mind factors will affect your biological brain and your spirit. If you do not have Jesus living in your heart, you are carrying truth-based guilt from unconfessed sin, and you are being harassed by demonic spirits, these spiritual factors will affect your brain and mind. At times it can be helpful to talk about the different parts of the brain-mind-spirit system separately, but even as we discuss the different parts it is important to remember that these parts have been synthesized into a profoundly integrated, interrelated, interconnected system.

It is also interesting and important to note that capacity and skills are interconnected. For example, psychological/spiritual maturity skills are most effectively learned by observing and practicing in the context of consistent, attuned relational connection with parents who already have good psychological/spiritual maturity skills. This very same process and context is simultaneously one of the most important ingredients for healthy neurological and psychological development, both of which contribute to strong capacity. But the connection is even closer than this. When you learn to walk, your biological brain records this new skill by making changes in the organization and specific connections of its neurological circuits. Similarly, when you learn psychological/spiritual maturity skills, at least some aspects of these new skills are recorded in the circuits of your biological brain – changes in your biological brain correspond to, reflect, and record your new maturity skills. And the circuits that correspond to strong maturity skills also seem to be healthy, well organized, well balanced circuits that are a part of healthy neurological and psychological development.

Putting all the pieces together: strong psychological/spiritual maturity skills are directly reflected in strong, well organized, well balanced brain circuits; these strong, well organized, well balanced brain circuits are a part of healthy neurological and psychological development; and the strong, well organized, well balanced brain circuits corresponding to healthy development contribute to strong brain-mind-spirit capacity. Furthermore, one important set of psychological/spiritual maturity skills has to do with knowing how to handle intense and painful situations, so these maturity skills will very directly contribute to increased capacity.

The larger, most important point here is that the brain-mind-spirit system is profoundly interconnected and interrelated, and that most of the concepts regarding the brain-mind-spirit system are also profoundly interconnected and interrelated. Another way to put this is: “When dealing with something as complex, integrated, and interconnected as the brain-mind-spirit system, it is good to be humble and to remember that the boundaries between many of our conceptual distinctions are fuzzy.”

Involuntary capacity vs voluntary capacity: As I have been working on this material regarding psychological trauma and the pain processing pathway, I have found it helpful to make a distinction between what I call *involuntary capacity* and what I call *voluntary capacity*. Since involuntary capacity primarily involves the physical limitations in the biological brain, and voluntary capacity primarily involves limitations of will and courage in the mind and spirit, I sometimes refer to involuntary capacity as biological brain capacity, and to voluntary capacity as

mind/spirit capacity.⁴

With respect to involuntary capacity, the most important point is that you are *not* consciously aware of the limitations of your involuntary capacity, and you do *not* make conscious, voluntary choices about what happens when you exceed your involuntary capacity. For example, one aspect of involuntary capacity has to do with whether or not you are able to “load” the content from a given *painful event* into your normal conscious awareness at the time of the original experience. As described earlier, all of the level 2 neurological circuits are below the cortex, and this means that they are *involuntary* and *non-conscious*. When you encounter an intensely painful event, these *subcortical, unconscious, involuntary* level 2 circuits also happen to be the neurological circuits that assess “Does this experience exceed the capacity limit?” And if the experience does exceed your involuntary capacity, these are the circuits that implement dissociative disconnection by routing the content to an alternative neurological pathway, as opposed to allowing it into your normal conscious awareness.⁵ Therefore, all of these processes will also be *involuntary* and *non-conscious*.

So, if you are on a jungle patrol in Viet Nam, and the guy immediately in front of you is blown to pieces by a land mine, if this experience exceeds your level 2 involuntary capacity you will be unable retain it in your normal conscious awareness. You will *not* be consciously aware of your level 2 brain capacity limits, you will *not* be consciously aware of the level 2 neurological circuits routing the content to an alternative pathway, and you will *not* be making any voluntary choice to refuse the experience; but regardless of your courage or choices, your brain will refuse to allow this content into the usual processing pathway, and you will therefore be unable to retain the experience in your normal conscious awareness. You will experience a “blackout” covering some portion of the event, and then “come too” some minutes later – maybe half way back to camp, with your friend’s arms and legs hanging out of your back pack. Memory for this experience will be stored as dissociated memory, it will come forward as a “flashback” whenever triggering stimuli are powerful enough to overcome the dissociative barriers, and as long as this content continues to exceed your involuntary capacity, you will have blackouts for these flashbacks as the overwhelming content is once again shunted to an alternative pathway and once again stored as dissociated memory.

Another aspect of involuntary capacity has to do with whether or not you are able to “load” the content from a given *traumatic memory* into your normal conscious awareness. When you try to bring a traumatic memory into your conscious awareness, these same *subcortical, unconscious, involuntary* level 2 circuits are the neurological circuits that assess “Does this memory exceed the capacity limit?” And if the memory content does exceed your involuntary capacity, these are the circuits that implement dissociative disconnection by routing the content to an alternative neurological pathway, as opposed to allowing it into your normal conscious awareness.

⁴ Although involuntary capacity is also affected by the mind and spirit, and voluntary capacity is also affected by the biological brain, involuntary capacity *primarily* involves physical limitations in the biological brain, and voluntary capacity *primarily* involves limitations of will and courage in the mind and spirit. As already noted, the brain-mind-spirit system is so complex, integrated, and interconnected that the boundaries between many conceptual distinctions are fuzzy.

⁵ This is my current hypothesis for how level 2 circuits implement dissociative disconnection. For additional discussion of involuntary capacity, the alternative processing pathway, and level 2 dissociative disconnection, see Part VI: Special Subjects.

Therefore, both the capacity assessment and the actual dissociative disconnection are also *involuntary* and *non-conscious*. So, if you are in a therapy session, and you are trying to work on the Viet Nam memory of your friend being blow up, *but this content still exceeds your level 2 involuntary capacity*, then you will be unable to bring it into your normal conscious awareness. You will *not* be consciously aware of your level 2 brain capacity limits, you will *not* be consciously aware of the level 2 neurological circuits implementing dissociative disconnection by routing the content to an alternative pathway, and you will *not* be making any voluntary choice to refuse the memory; but regardless of your best intentions, earnest desires, and courageous choices to try to remember this event, your brain will simply refuse to “load” the memory into your normal⁶ conscious awareness.

In contrast to involuntary brain capacity, when we are dealing with voluntary mind/spirit capacity we *are* consciously aware of the limitations of our capacity, and we *do* make conscious, voluntary choices about what happens when we exceed our capacity. For example, when you are in a ministry session working on a traumatic memory, you are consciously aware of feeling depleted as the painful, difficult work continues, and you are consciously aware of the choice “Do I keep going, or is it time to quit?” If you are working on an intensely painful memory, and resolution is not coming quickly, you will be especially aware of the overall accumulated load of suffering,⁷ and you will be especially aware of how hard it is to stay with the memory. If you eventually decide “I’ve had enough for today,” you will then end this particular attempt to process the memory by making conscious, voluntary choices to use various tools to shut the memory down.

An analogy to our brain-mind-spirit system that includes both involuntary and voluntary capacity would be an electrical system that includes *your hand* bridging the gap between two parts of the circuit. *Involuntary* capacity would be “How much current can the circuit carry before one of the electrical components burns out?” whereas *voluntary* capacity would be “How much current can the circuit carry before you pull your hand away?” As the current is steadily increased, the electrical flow can be shut down either by your choice to pull your hand away, or by some other part of the circuit burning out. And just as with our brain-mind-spirit system, in most situations, the current will exceed voluntary capacity and you will pull your hand away before the current exceeds involuntary capacity and burns out some other part of the circuit.

Involuntary capacity, dissociative phenomena, circuit-breakers, and house fires: If I turn on the microwave without noticing that the air conditioner is running and that Charlotte is also using the vacuum cleaner, the circuit breaker pops, the lights go out, and everything shuts down. How frustrating! I have to stop what I’m doing, go down to the basement, and reset the circuit breaker. This is certainly a hassle, and I might even be tempted to just pull those irritating circuit breakers right out of the system. But then I remember what happened before circuit breakers. Before

⁶ As mentioned above, when triggering stimuli are sufficiently powerful to overcome the dissociative barriers, memories that you are not able to load into your normal conscious awareness will be a part of *abnormal* conscious awareness in the context of flashbacks, and as long as the content continues to exceed your involuntary capacity, you will have blackouts for these flashbacks as the overwhelming content is once again shunted to an alternative pathway and the content is once again stored as dissociated memories.

⁷ For an especially rigorous and powerful formulation of the overall accumulated load of stress and suffering, see Appendix A for a description of the concept of “total area under the curve.”

circuit breakers,⁸ when the electrical current exceeded the capacity of the wiring, the wires just got hot. And then turned red. And then started to smoke. And then started fires inside the walls of your house.

So let's think about this for a minute: the lights go off and I have to run down to the basement to reset the circuit breaker, or my house burns down? I don't know....This is a really hard one....Could you give me some more time?

Okay, I take it back. Those little circuit breakers are a *wonderful* design feature, and I'll leave them right where they belong.

When working with extreme trauma, blackouts, flashbacks, and other dissociative phenomena, it often seems that dissociation makes the emotional healing process more complicated, and at times we can become frustrated or impatient with this additional difficulty. When dealing with the additional challenges caused by dissociation, it's important to remember that this fascinating phenomena prevents much greater damage that would be caused by allowing the person to be totally overwhelmed by pain exceeding the involuntary capacity of his brain/mind/spirit system.

In light of this additional discussion, the "electrical system that includes your hand" analogy above should actually read: "*Involuntary* capacity would be 'How much current can the circuit carry *before the circuit breaker pops?*'" and "As the current is steadily increased, the electrical flow can be shut down either by your choice to pull your hand away, *or by the circuit breaker popping (before some other component burns out).*"

Five levels of function within the emotional/social processing system: Our bodies are very complex and contain a number of different organ systems that work together, such as the nervous system, the cardiovascular system, the respiratory system, and the gastro-intestinal system. Each of these organ systems are also complex, and are composed of different parts that work together. For example, the gastrointestinal system is composed of the mouth, teeth, tongue, esophagus, stomach, liver, gallbladder, pancreas, small intestines, large intestines, etc, and these parts all work together to process incoming food and outgoing waste. Similarly, our brains are very complex and contain a number of different neurological systems that work together; and just as with the organ systems in the body, these neurological systems are complex and are composed of different parts that work together. One of the most important and complex systems in the brain is the system that handles emotions and social interactions, and this emotional/social processing system is composed of many different parts, such as the basal ganglia, the thalamus, the amygdala, the cingulate cortex, the right-sided prefrontal cortex, and the left sided prefrontal cortex.

Some who study this emotional/social processing system like to organize it into five levels, with level 1 including the basal ganglia and the thalamus, level 2 including the amygdala, level 3 including the right-sided cingulate cortex, level 4 including the right-sided prefrontal cortex, and level 5 including the left-sided prefrontal cortex. NOTE: The most important thing here is to keep track of the functions performed at each of the 5 different levels. Some people, like myself,

⁸ Actually, primitive devices called fuses came before circuit breakers, but many of the younger readers won't remember this. If we are going to be historically accurate, it was before *fuses* that electrical overload frequently resulted in house fires.

find it helpful to have specific names for the neurological structures that contribute to each level. My experience is that knowing the neurological structures provides additional reference points that help keep me oriented as I try to understand and integrate the large amount of material presented at the THRIVE conferences. However, my guess is that most readers just being introduced to this material will be best served by letting go of the brain structures for now (conserve your brain power for keeping track of the functions performed at each level).

Why five *levels*?: One might ask “Why the hierarchical structure of five *levels*, as opposed to five *components* that work together as equal team members? There are several reasons for this. One is that the brain structures contributing to the lower levels are more primitive than the brain structures contributing to the higher levels. The basal ganglia, thalamus, and amygdala contributing to levels 1 and 2 are in the primitive core of the brain, below the cortex; the cingulate cortex contributing to level 3 is a cortical structure, and more advanced than the subcortical structures in the core of the brain, but still primitive in comparison to the cortex towards the front of the brain; and the right and left prefrontal cortices contributing to levels 4 and 5 are the most advanced structures in the brain.

A second reason, related to the first, is that all functions performed by subcortical structures are unconscious and involuntary, which means that all level 1 and level 2 functions are unconscious and involuntary. In contrast, many functions performed by cortical structures are conscious and voluntary, and observations regarding levels 3, 4, and 5 reveal that many of their functions are conscious and voluntary.

A third reason is that the availability of both structure and function progresses from the lower levels to the higher levels, with the lower level structures and functions becoming available earlier. Both the structures and functions for levels 1 and 2 are already available at birth. The cingulate cortex structure for level 3 is ready at birth, but it cannot perform its functions until it has been trained. In the ideal scenario we receive much of our level 3 training during infancy, but often parts of our level 3 training are not completed until later in life. The right and left prefrontal cortex structures for levels 4 and 5 are not even available until well into childhood, and like level 3, levels 4 and 5 cannot perform their functions until they have been trained. Training for levels 4 and 5 cannot begin until the structures become available in childhood, and level 4 and 5 training usually continues throughout life.

A fourth reason to arrange the levels hierarchically is that one’s journey through the pain processing pathway progresses from the lower levels to the higher levels as the emotional and social information from a new experience is passed forward/upward.⁹ As described below, processing of painful experiences begins at levels 1 and 2, and then progresses forwards/upwards through levels 3, 4, and 5.

A fifth reason to arrange the levels hierarchically is that desynchronization and “shutdown” progress from higher levels to lower levels as a person becomes increasingly overwhelmed. If the

⁹ Some authors talk about new information being passed “forward” because the neurological structures contributing to the lower levels of brain function are physically more towards the back of the brain, and new information is literally passed forward as it moves from being processed at lower levels to being processed at higher levels. Other authors talk about new information, and/or the journey through the pain processing pathway, as moving “upward,” as figurative language corresponding to moving from being processed at lower levels of brain function to being processed at higher levels.

overall load of a situation begins to overwhelm your involuntary capacity, certain parts of your brain will function with increasing difficulty, and then eventually shut down completely. When this dysfunction and shutdown occurs, it starts at level 5, and then progresses downwards to level 3.¹⁰

Summary of functions that relate to the pain processing pathway: Each of the 5 levels of the emotional/social processing system carries out many different functions, but for the purposes of this document I will summarize only the functions that relate to the pain processing pathway.¹¹

Level 1: Level 1 contains the neurological circuitry that moderates attachment (bonding) to other people. At any given moment, activity in your level 1 circuits determines whether you are operating from a foundation of secure attachment, dismissive attachment, distracted attachment, or disorganized attachment. Level 1 attachment circuits also initiate the emotional experience of joy when we perceive that someone is glad to be with us.

Level 2: Level 2 contains the neurological circuitry that moderates connection to an experience. If an experience moderately exceeds our involuntary capacity, one set of level 2 neurological mechanisms cause emotional disconnection. If an experience more severely exceeds our involuntary capacity, a second set of level 2 neurological mechanisms cause complete dissociative disconnection by routing the content through an alternative processing pathway. When this happens the experience is completely disconnected from our normal conscious awareness and from our conscious autobiographical memory.

Level 3: Level 3 contains the neurological circuitry that moderates relational connection to others. The level 3 right-sided cingulate cortex is the part of our brain that our mind uses to maintain attuned relational connection to the Lord and/or others in our community, *even during painful experiences*; and when we experience a negative emotion that is beyond the ability of our level 3 skills, and we therefore temporarily become non-relational and lose joy, the level 3 cingulate cortex is the part of our brain that our mind uses to re-establish attuned relational connection. For those of your familiar with Dr. Wilder's teaching, this is where "returning to joy" comes in, because once our level 3 circuits have re-established attuned relational connection our level 1 attachment circuits re-establish joy.

Level 4: Level 4 contains the neurological circuitry that helps us hold onto our true hearts as the source of discernment and choices, even when we are dealing with difficult situations.¹²

¹⁰ Note that the sub-cortical, involuntary, and non-conscious functions at levels 1 and 2 never shut down. As discussed below, if a painful situation or traumatic memory becomes profoundly overwhelming, level 2 will employ non-conscious neurological mechanisms to cause disconnection from our emotions and normal conscious awareness, but the sub-cortical, involuntary, and non-conscious functions at levels 1 and 2 continue even after this disconnection from our emotions and normal conscious awareness has occurred.

¹¹ The emotional/social processing system is immensely complex, and this material developed for use by lay readers has therefore been dramatically simplified. Even within the subset of functions related to the pain processing pathway, I am including only the one or two most important functions.

¹² In THRIVE material, when Dr. Wilder talks about maintaining our true hearts as the source of discernment and choices, he uses the phrase: "Knowing who I am, and what it's like me to do in this situation."

The level 4 right prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that the mind uses to discern “How do I handle this situation? How can I navigate this situation *in a way that I will be satisfied with after it’s all over?*” Level 4 also contains the neurological circuitry that calms the brain down – after the source of distress has been resolved, these level 4 circuits take the brain from the subjective experience of feeling negative emotions to the subjective experience of feeling peaceful/calm.

Level 5: Level 5 contains the neurological circuitry that helps us “make sense” out of our experiences and that helps us interpret the meaning of our experiences. The level 5 left prefrontal cortex is the logical, analytical, linguistic part of the brain that the mind uses to come up with explanations, models, paradigms, and worldviews. The level 5 prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that the mind uses to build an autobiographical narrative that tells the story of our experience. One of the most important functions of level 5 is to *interpret the meaning of the experience with respect to ourselves*, with the final product of this level 5 process being *cognitive beliefs* regarding the meaning of the experience with respect to ourselves.

Right hemisphere emotions, left hemisphere emotions, and other emotional experiences: As we discuss the pain processing pathway it will be very helpful to understand the difference between right hemisphere primal emotions, emotional experiences at level 4, emotional experiences at level 5, and left hemisphere cognition-driven emotions. One of the most important reasons to understand these distinctions, when helping a person through her pain processing journey, is that distressing experiences from each of these different categories require different kinds of interventions.

Right hemisphere,¹³ primal, non-cognitive emotions: When we encounter and then move through an experience, each wave of new information first enters the emotional/social processing system at levels 1 and 2, and as this information is processed, activity in these primitive, rapid response, right-sided neurological structures generate/initiate emotions.¹⁴ These right-sided emotions are generated so quickly that they feel instantaneous; they are generated by involuntary neurological activity, so we do not experience any sense of choice regarding whether or not we will feel these emotions; and they are generated by nonconscious neurological activity, so we are not consciously aware of the underlying processes that produce them. These fast, involuntary, unconsciously driven, right-sided emotions are *not* produced by cognitive beliefs, but rather occur before we have even begun to formulate cognitive interpretations regarding the new information. After right-sided emotions have come forward into your conscious awareness, your left-sided language circuits can try to get

¹³ It would be more precise to refer to these emotions as “right-hemisphere *dominant*” emotions, as opposed to “right-hemisphere” emotions, because at levels 1, 2, and 3 there is actually involvement of the thalamus, basal ganglia, amygdala, and cingulate cortex on both sides of the brain. The right sided neurological circuits are *dominant* in the production of “right-sided” emotions, with the degree of dominance increasing steadily as you go from level 1 to level 3, but the left-sided circuits are also involved. However, for the purposes of this simplified discussion we will refer to these emotions as simply “right-hemisphere,” or “right-sided” emotions.

¹⁴ Initiated as part of very rapid responses from levels 1 and 2, right-sided emotions can also receive contributions from levels 3 and 4 as they move forward through the emotional/social processing system. For example, joy originates in the attachment circuits at level 1, but then level 4 circuits amplify the intensity of the joy as it travels forward through the social/emotional processing system.

words to match the feelings, but you will never be able to get words that truly fit the fundamentally non-verbal, non-cognitive right-sided emotions.¹⁵

For example, if you step out into an intersection, and then realize that you have just stepped in front of a truck that you had not seen,¹⁶ you will experience an immediate wave of visceral fear that washes through your body, and you will respond with immediate, reflex, involuntary behavioral responses (such as screaming and attempting to dive out of the way). These primal, visceral, immediate, right-sided emotional and behavioral responses will already be unfolding before your left hemisphere even begins putting together its language-based cognitive formulation or generating the subsequent cognition-based emotions. By the time the wave of right-sided fear has already washed through you, and you are screaming and trying to dive out of the way, your left hemisphere will still be working on: “There’s a truck barreling down on me, and I don’t think the driver even sees me. I’m going to get hit by a truck and be seriously injured. This is really, really going to hurt. I don’t like pain, and I’m terrified of emergency rooms,” and will just be beginning to generate left-sided emotions based on these cognitions. In fact, researchers can actually observe physiological reactions and the initiation of escape behavior, that correspond to the almost instantaneous subjective experience of feeling right-sided fear, and that occur *before you have formulated left hemisphere cognitions or begun to produce left-sided emotions*.

Being involuntary, non-cognitive, and almost instantaneous, right-sided emotions feel especially core and primal.

The positive right-sided emotion is joy, and the basic negative right-sided emotions are fear, anger, disgust, sadness, shame, and hopeless despair. Dr. Wilder refers to these as the “big six” basic negative right-sided emotions, and you can combine these basic emotions to get a wide variety of complex right-sided emotions. For example, when I was working in the emergency room, a farmer was brought in who had gotten his leg caught in a corn auger. His leg was horribly mangled, with details that I don’t even want to include here, and when I saw it I experienced the complex right-sided emotion of horror – a combination of the right-sided emotions of disgust, fear, and sadness – involuntary, non-cognitive disgust in response to the bloody mess of mangled skin, muscle, bone, etc; involuntary, non-cognitive fear in response to seeing such a huge, life threatening wound; and involuntary, non-cognitive sadness in response to seeing another person hurt so badly.

A few additional comments regarding joy, and also each of the “big six” negative emotions:

Joy: When you look at someone’s face, and you can see from his expression and from the

¹⁵ As described below, information from the experiences that produce right-sided emotions will eventually travel across to the left side, left-hemisphere circuits will generate language-based cognitions to interpret the experiences, and then these cognitions will travel back to emotion generating circuits where left-sided, cognition-based emotions are generated. If you observe very carefully, and pull the pieces apart, you will find that the *words* you come up with will usually *exactly match* the cognition-based left-sided emotions, but that you will never be able to get words that truly, fully, adequately express the fundamentally non-verbal, non-cognitive right-sided emotions.

¹⁶ You would have heard it coming if you had not been wearing head phones and listening to loud music.

sparkle in his eyes that he likes you and that he is glad to be with you, the level 1 attachment circuits in your emotional/social processing system will respond with joy. A warm, wonderful feeling bubbles up in your heart, you are glad to be alive, and you are especially glad to be with the person who is glad to be with you. As with all right-hemisphere emotions, this joy response wells up inside you very quickly, it is not voluntarily, you are not consciously aware of the underlying processes that produce it,¹⁷ and it is not caused by cognitive beliefs.

Fear: When you perceive threat from immediate physical danger, the level 2 amygdala circuits in your emotional/social processing system will respond with the well known fight or flight reflex. Your amygdala circuits make an extremely fast determination regarding whether you are likely to succeed in fighting off the threat, or whether running away would be a better plan. In situations where fight makes no sense and flight makes a lot of sense, such as the approaching truck in the example above, your level 2 amygdala circuits then respond with right-hemisphere fear as part of the “flight” response.¹⁸ As with all right-hemisphere emotions, right-hemisphere fear is a primal, visceral, involuntary, extremely fast emotional response, it is not driven by cognitive beliefs, and we are not consciously aware of the processes that produce it.

Anger¹⁹: As just described above, when you perceive threat from immediate physical danger, the level 2 amygdala circuits in your emotional/social processing system will respond with the well known fight or flight reflex. Your amygdala circuits make an extremely fast determination regarding whether fighting or fleeing would be the better plan, and in situations where it makes sense to fight the threat, your level 2 amygdala circuits then respond with right-hemisphere anger as part of the “fight” response.²⁰ As

¹⁷ If you understand these principles and watch for it, you can easily observe that the emotional response of joy comes as a result of perceiving that someone is glad to be with you, but you cannot consciously perceive the underlying sub-cortical, non-conscious, level 1 processes that actually produce the response.

¹⁸ Two of the most straightforward data points indicating that right-sided fear is produced by level 2 amygdala circuits are provided by animal studies demonstrating that direct amygdala stimulation produces immediate, intense fear reactions, and animal research demonstrating that damage to the amygdala blocks fear reactions. For additional discussion of the evidence supporting the amygdala as the source of right-sided fear, see Davis, Michael, “Neurobiology of fear responses: The role of the amygdala,” *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*. 1997, Vol. 9, pages 382-402.

¹⁹ Dr. Schore discusses two different types of aggression, one being the emotionally “cold” aggression seen in a predator stalking prey, that is based on parasympathetic stimulation; and the second being emotionally “hot” aggression that is seen in the defensive fight response, and that is based on sympathetic stimulation. The anger described and discussed here is the emotion associated with the sympathetic, “hot,” defensive “fight” response aggression. For additional discussion regarding these two types of aggression, see Schore, Allen N., *Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self*. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company), 2003, pages 211 & 212

²⁰ Right-sided anger is neurologically more complex than fear, and also involves circuits other than the level 2 amygdala circuits, but case studies and research indicate that the amygdala is one of the contributors. For example, there is an extensively documented human case study in which seizure activity in the amygdala directly corresponded to sudden, intense episodes of “fight or flight” anger; and direct electrical stimulation to this same area consistently produced the same sudden, intense anger. For a

with all right-hemisphere emotions, right-sided anger is a primal, visceral, involuntary, non-conscious, extremely fast emotional response, and it is not driven by cognitive beliefs.

For example, when I am out walking, and a small dog rushes out of someone's yard, barking and baring its teeth, I experience an immediate wave of visceral anger²¹ that washes through my body, and I respond with immediate, reflex, involuntary behavioral responses (such as whirling to face the threat, crouching in a fighting posture, reaching my hands out towards the threat, with my fingers ready to grab, and baring my teeth in an angry expression). These primal, visceral, immediate, right-sided emotional and behavioral responses will already be unfolding before my left hemisphere even begins putting together its language-based cognitive formulation or generating the subsequent cognition-based emotions. By the time the wave of right-sided anger has already washed through me, and I have already whirled to face the dog and crouched to prepare for a fight, my left hemisphere will still be working on: "There's a small dog attacking me, and I don't think it's on a chain that will stop it before it gets here. How dare you attack me and frighten me, you obnoxious little rat! If you actually try to bite me, I'll grab you by the neck and shake you till your teeth rattle! Maybe I'll body slam you on the side walk, and then leave you on the porch of your family, who are so rude as to let their dog attack pedestrians,...etc," and will just be beginning to generate left-sided emotions based on these cognitions. As with fear, researchers can actually observe physiological reactions and the initiation of "fight" behavior, that correspond to the almost instantaneous subjective experience of feeling right-sided anger, and that occur *before you have formulated left hemisphere cognitions or begun to produce left-sided emotions*.

There is also a second flavor, or variety, of right-sided anger. The level 2 amygdala circuits also happen to be responsible for identifying things you want, and then motivating you to go after them. When something thwarts your attempt to obtain the thing you want and have been pursuing, level 2 responds with a burst of right-sided anger/frustration. As mentioned above, if you try to get language to match right-sided emotions, you will never be able to get words to adequately express the fundamentally non-verbal, non-cognitive feelings, but the functional content of this right-sided anger/frustration would be something like: "Get out of my way!" or "Push harder – make it move!"

As with all right-hemisphere emotions, right-hemisphere anger is a primal, visceral, involuntary, extremely fast emotional response, it is not driven by cognitive beliefs, and we are not consciously aware of the processes that produce it.

Another interesting aspect of right-sided anger is that it is always "clean" with respect to judgment and contempt, since judgment and contempt are *produced by* underlying left-sided judgmental and contemptuous thoughts, and therefore can never occur without these underlying left-sided cognitions. Right sided anger can be *associated with* left-sided

detailed discussion of this case study, see Mark, Vernon H., & Ervin, Frank R. *Violence & the Brain*. (New York, NY: Harper & Row) 1970, pages 97-108.

²¹ I also experience some right-sided fear, but if a *small* dog threatens me, my primary response is anger.

phenomena, including left-sided judgment and contempt, but the right-sided anger itself is inherently “clean,” or neutral, with respect to judgment and contempt.

Sadness: When you lose someone or something you are attached to, your level 1 attachment circuits will produce the right-hemisphere emotion and physical reactions of sadness.²² My experience of learning about our first miscarriage provides a good example of right-sided sadness. Charlotte and I had gone in for the 3 month visit that is a routine part of prenatal care in our OB/Gyn’s practice. An ultrasound is not usually part of the 3 month visit, but at the end of our appointment, Dr. Warner said “the ultrasound room is open – if you want, we can just take a quick peek.” As soon as Dr. Warner began rubbing the ultrasound probe on Charlotte’s abdomen, we could see our child on the screen. Even as early as 12 weeks, we could easily make out the head, rib-cage, arms, and legs of a small body. We could count the ribs, and could even see fingers and toes on our child’s hands and feet. Charlotte and I were excitedly pointing, and exclaiming about the many details so clearly visible on the screen, when Dr. Warner said “What’s concerning me is that I can’t find a heart beat.”

Even as she was finishing her sentence, I realized that she had been going back and forth through the rib cage for the last several minutes, and a beating heart would have been easy and obvious to see. Instantly, before my left-hemisphere had gone through any logical analysis, or formulated any language based cognitions, the intuitive processes in my right hemisphere correctly perceived that our child had died. The moment my intuitive right hemisphere realized our child was gone, a wave of sadness washed through me, and along with feeling the subjective emotion of sadness, my facial expression fell (from the happy excitement of a moment before to an expression of sadness), tears sprung into my eyes, I felt tightness in my throat and chest, and my whole body suddenly felt heavy.

These primal, visceral, immediate, right-sided emotional/body responses were already unfolding before my left hemisphere had even begun to put together a language-based cognitive formulation, or to generate the subsequent cognition-based emotions. By the time the wave of right-sided sadness had already washed through me, and I was feeling tightness in my throat, heaviness in my body, and had tears in my eyes, my left hemisphere was still working on: “Our child has died – our child is gone. We’re not pregnant anymore. We’ve been thinking about what it will be like to have a child with us this coming Christmas – I guess that won’t be happening after all....etc,” and was just beginning to generate left-sided emotions based on these cognitions.

As with all right-hemisphere emotions, right-hemisphere sadness is a primal, visceral, involuntary, extremely fast emotional response, it is not driven by cognitive beliefs, and we are not consciously aware of the processes that produce it.

Disgust: As mentioned above, the level 2 amygdala circuits help you identify things that

²² I am not aware of research support for this level 1 origin of sadness, but some of the prominent neuropsychology theorists include sadness as one of the right-sided basic emotions, and this is my hypothesis regarding its neurological origin. If you are aware of research support for this proposed theory, please contact me at drkarl@kclehman.com.

you want, and then provide emotional responses (various forms of desire, such as hunger and thirst) that motivate you to pursue them. These same level 2 amygdala circuits also help you identify things that are bad for you – things you do *not* want – and then provide an emotional response that motivates you to avoid them. When you encounter something that looks, smells, or tastes foul, your level 2 amygdala circuits will produce the right-sided emotion and physical reactions of disgust.

For example, let's say you are on a camping trip, you are sitting around the campfire after dinner, and you are deeply engrossed in a good book. As you are eagerly reading, totally absorbed in discovering whether the hero dies a noble death or is rescued at the last minute, you reach over to pick up the remaining piece of a sandwich that you had temporarily set down on a rock next to you. Just as the sandwich fragment is about to enter your mouth, you smell a foul odor, and see that you have accidentally picked up a dead mouse that your pet dog discovered in the woods and lovingly laid on top of your sandwich. The moment you see and smell the rotting, maggot-covered mouse, an immediate wave of visceral disgust will wash through your body, and you will respond with immediate, reflex, involuntary behavioral responses, such as jerking your head back and turning your face away from the disgusting smell and sight, as you simultaneously fling the foul carcass away from you, and grimace with the classic disgust grimace (if you imagined the dead mouse in enough detail, you probably did the disgust grimace as you were reading this example). If you actually put it in your mouth before realizing what it is, your disgust reactions will also include gagging, compulsive, repeated "spitting it out," a wave of nausea, and maybe even retching.

These primal, visceral, immediate, right-sided emotional and behavioral responses will already be unfolding before your left hemisphere even begins putting together its language-based cognitive formulation or generating the subsequent cognition-based emotions. By the time the wave of right-sided disgust has already washed through you, and you have already grimaced, jerked your head back, and flung the dead mouse into the bushes, your left hemisphere will still be working on: "This is soooo disgusting! I can't believe I almost put that thing in my mouth! I could have had a dead mouse with *maggots* in my mouth! Ugh! Yuck! Gross, gross, gross, gross, gross! Just *thinking* about it almost makes me puke!...etc," and will just be beginning to generate left-sided emotions based on these cognitions.

As with all right-hemisphere emotions, right-hemisphere disgust is a primal, visceral, involuntary, extremely fast emotional response, it is not driven by cognitive beliefs, and we are not consciously aware of the processes that produce it.

Right-sided shame/mis-attunement pain/anti-joy: When you are wanting and anticipating a positive relational connection, and especially wanting and anticipating the other person to *understand you, share your feelings, and be glad to be with you*, but then the relational connection unexpectedly goes badly, your level 1 attachment circuits produce a sudden, miserable, right-sided emotional response. For example, let's say you have been thinking about your wife this afternoon, and especially thinking about all the ways in which she is a wonderful partner. The more you think about how much you appreciate her, the more you feel affection for her, the more you want to be with her, and the more you want to do something special for her. You finally decide to go out and put

together an extra special surprise – you spend an hour finding a pair of earrings you think she will especially like, you pick up a pint of her favorite ice cream, and you have the florist put together an arrangement with her favorite flowers. As you come up the porch and ring the bell, you are imagining and anticipating her surprise and pleasure, and you are especially looking forward to the big “I love you and I’m glad to be with you” smile, hug, and kiss that you are expecting to receive when she opens the door and sees the flowers.

But what if you have completely forgotten about the early dinner date that had been planned for this same evening, and your wife has been wondering where on earth you went, going back and forth between being frightened that something may have happened to you and angry that you forgot about your plans to have the Johnson’s over for an early dinner? When she meets you at the door, instead of a hug, a kiss, and an affectionate “You are such a wonderful husband! Thank you for the flowers. Maybe I should change into lingerie...?” You get a frustrated “Where have you been?! Didn’t you remember we had an early dinner date planned for this evening? I had to get everything ready without your help. We’ve all been here, waiting for you, for the last 30 minutes, and now the food is cold!”

Unless your internal experience is completely dominated by more powerful triggered emotions, such as fear of her anger, you will feel a miserable sinking feeling as your relational expectations collide with the unpleasant reality of a frustrated wife who is *not* glad to be with you. The excited look of anticipation on your face will crumple into an expression of crestfallen disappointment (if you were a kid, your friends would think you were about to start crying), and your internal feeling of excited anticipation will collapse into a sickening, “ugh,” heavy feeling in the pit of your stomach. As with all right-hemisphere emotions, this unpleasant wave of relational disappointment pain will feel instantaneous and involuntary, you will not be consciously aware of the underlying processes that produce it, and it will not be caused by cognitive beliefs.

Some authors use the word “shame” for this right-sided emotion, but I think this causes confusion, since most people use the word “shame” to refer to the left-sided emotion caused by “I’m bad” cognitive beliefs. Instead, I use the terms **right-sided shame**, **mis-attunement pain**, or **anti-joy**. I do not know who originally came up with the term “mis-attunement pain,” but it is excellent with respect to accuracy, although obscure to the average lay-reader. As described below, the positive relational experience of attunement includes having somebody understand you, share your feelings, and be glad to be with you. Mis-attunement pain refers to how this negative right-sided emotion is produced when you are wanting and expecting the positive experience of attunement, but then instead run into mis-attunement. I came up with the term “*anti-joy*” as I thought about how joy is produced by feeling like somebody understands you, shares your feelings, and is glad to be with you, and then realized that mis-attunement pain (or *anti-joy*) is produced by the *opposite* experience – mis-attunement pain/*anti-joy* is the bad feeling you get when someone does *not* understand you, does *not* share your feelings, and is **not** glad to be with you.

I think “*Right-sided shame*” is also a helpful term, in that it clearly differentiates this negative right-sided emotion from the more commonly understood left-sided, “I’m bad”

shame; and it also acknowledges that the two are usually connected, since relational tangles that cause right-sided shame will usually also trigger left-sided, “I’m bad” shame. In fact, in my own experience, mis-attunement so consistently triggered left-sided, “I’m bad” shame that I was not even able to perceive the existence of right-sided shame until I had received a lot of healing for left-sided shame memories. I can still remember the first time I perceived right-sided shame as a separate entity. I was in the middle of a painful mis-attunement experience with Charlotte, and I actually paused to figure out what was going on because something felt so different. We had experienced similar relational expectation collisions many times in the past, and these previous episodes of mis-attunement had always triggered “I’m bad” left-sided shame. My triggering had become increasingly clear as we worked to understand and resolve these previous relational expectation collisions, and we had even been able to talk explicitly about how my triggered shame contributed to these situations being so difficult.

However, on this occasion I realized that I was feeling some kind of unpleasant emotion, but I was *not* feeling triggered, and I was *not* feeling any sense of “I’m bad” shame. I remember thinking something along the lines of: “Wait a minute. This is the part of the story where I feel triggered, and where I feel that I’m bad and shameful. What’s happening here? I’m feeling something, but I don’t know what it is.” Eventually, I realized that I was simply feeling clean, right-sided mis-attunement pain, *without contamination from triggered “I’m bad” shame*. I remember thinking: “Oh, wow! This must be what they’re talking about. This must be what they mean when they talk about mis-attunement pain!” I had never previously been able to perceive the mis-attunement pain as a separate entity because it had always been mixed in with the more powerful, triggered, “I’m bad” shame. If you watch carefully, and get triggered left-sided emotions out of the way, you can certainly observe right-sided shame/mis-attunement pain/anti-joy in your own experience.

Right-sided hopeless despair/“shutdown” response: The last basic right-hemisphere emotion is right-sided hopeless despair, which I also call the “shutdown” response. When you encounter a problem, neurological circuits in your right-hemisphere make an assessment with respect to whether you should attempt some kind of solution, or whether it would be better to just turn things off and wait for something to change. If your right hemisphere intuitive assessment concludes that there is no useful response worth attempting, neurological circuits in your social/emotional processing system initiate the emotional and physical response of right-sided hopeless despair. You experience the subjective emotion of right-sided hopeless despair, your mental and physical energies collapse (as if someone had just removed your batteries), you lose all motivation or initiative regarding any kind of response, and you feel like flopping onto the ground.

I use the term “right-sided” hopeless despair to distinguish this right-hemisphere emotional and physical response from the more commonly understood left-sided version, which is *inherently* based on hopeless despair cognitions, such as: “This situation is hopeless – it’s bad (fill in the blank regarding the details), it’s never going to change, and there’s nothing I can do about it.” At some level, there is also a conclusion and decision along the lines of “Letting myself sink into hopeless despair will hurt less than continuing to hope and then being disappointed. If I focus my energy on accepting the inevitable, it won’t hurt as bad when it gets here. I quit, and choose hopeless despair.” In fact, I am

always careful to use “*right-sided* hopeless despair,” and actually prefer “shutdown response,” because I think “hopeless despair” is a misleading and confusing term. My perception is that the right-sided hopeless despair/shutdown response *does not actually include any meaning of hopelessness or despair*. It is mostly a visceral, body-based, pragmatic response designed to conserve resources. As mentioned above, if you try to find language to match right-sided emotions, you will never be able to get words to truly, adequately express the fundamentally non-verbal, non-cognitive feelings. I find this to be especially true for right-sided hopeless despair. If I were forced to use words to express the functional content of right-sided hopeless despair, I would come up with something like: “There are no response options available that would actually be helpful, so the best plan is to turn things off and wait for something to change. If something changes, we can turn things back on when a useful response actually becomes available.”

The following analogy might be helpful: Let’s say you are fishing on a large lake, but your motor dies so that you are stranded out on the lake as night falls. You hope someone will eventually come looking for you, but since you have never used your boat at night, you don’t have any lights. As you sit there in the dark, you remember that you have a flashlight in your tackle box. At first you wave it around frantically, trying to see if there is anyone else nearby and trying to signal for help. Then you realize that any other boat out at night would have lights, and you decide to turn off your flashlight *to save the batteries*. You are not turning off your light because you believe that it’s hopeless or are feeling despair, but rather because you realize that it is absolutely pointless to leave it on when you know there are no other boats nearby. You turn off your flashlight to save the batteries. If something changes – if you hear or see any indication of another boat nearby – you will turn it back on because it would actually do some good.

As with shame, it is difficult to perceive true right-sided hopeless despair because it is almost always mixed with left-sided hopeless despair – any situation that activates right-sided hopeless despair usually also triggers left-sided, cognition based hopeless despair. This has been so true in my own experience that I can’t think of any examples where I have been able to perceive right-sided hopeless despair as a separate entity, and I think this extremely common association between the right-sided shutdown response and left-sided hopeless despair is the reason various authors have used the term “hopeless despair” to describe this right-sided emotional response.

It is also important to realize that this right-sided hopeless despair/shutdown is *not* the same thing as the disconnection of emotions and conscious awareness that level 2 circuits mediate if a situation overwhelms your involuntary capacity. With the disconnection response, your emotions and conscious awareness disconnect, but you will continue to attempt solutions in your dissociated, disconnected state. With the hopeless despair/shutdown response, your emotions and conscious awareness remain connected, but you shut down any attempts to respond to the situation. Of course, these two responses can occur simultaneously, in which case your emotions and conscious awareness disconnect, and you also shut down any attempts to respond to the situation.

As with all right-hemisphere emotions, right-hemisphere hopeless despair is a primal,

visceral, involuntary, fast²³ emotional response, it is not driven by cognitive beliefs, and we are not consciously aware of the processes that produce it.

When you encounter a painful situation that generates negative right-sided emotions, and you are able to *optimally* complete level 3 processing tasks, you will *maintain* continuous attuned relational connection and the corresponding relational connection joy, even as you simultaneously feel the distressing emotions. If you temporarily lose attuned relational connection and relational connection joy, but are able to *adequately* complete level 3 processing tasks, you will be able to *re-establish* attuned relational connection and relational connection joy, even as you continue to experience the negative emotions. However, if you lose relational connection and relational connection joy, but are unable to restore them, then you will need an intervention that specifically addresses your inability to successfully complete this level 3 processing task. As will be described below, when you are unable to re-establish attuned relational connection and relational connection joy, the intervention you need is for somebody to reach out to you by initiating attunement, and then join you in your distress by sharing the negative emotions in a state of mutual mind.

Emotional experiences at level 4 (satisfaction and inadequacy): When you encounter a painful situation and successfully complete level 4 processing tasks, you are able to navigate the situation in a way that feels satisfying. If you are unable to find a satisfactory way to navigate the situation, you will feel inadequate. *Feeling* satisfied and *feeling* inadequate are emotional experiences.

These emotional experiences of satisfaction and inadequacy are different from right-sided emotions or left-sided emotions. When you are unable to find a satisfying way to navigate a painful situation, and are therefore stuck in a feeling of inadequacy, you need an intervention that specifically addresses your inability to successfully complete level 4 processing tasks. As will be described below, when you are unable to find a satisfying way to navigate a difficult situation, the intervention you need is for somebody to *model* a satisfying solution.

Emotional experiences at level 5 (confusion and understanding): When you encounter a painful situation and successfully complete level 5 processing tasks, you are able to make sense out of the situation. If you are unable to make sense out of the situation, you feel confused. We don't usually think of understanding and confusion as emotional experiences, but they are. Understanding – having the pieces fit together, and realizing “Oh! I get it! I understand now!” *feels* good, and this subjective good feeling is the emotional component of the experience of understanding. Confusion *feels* bad, and this subjective bad feeling is the emotional component of the experience of confusion.

These emotional experiences of understanding and confusion are different from right-sided emotions or left-sided emotions. When you are unable to make sense out of a painful

²³ Questions with respect to timing for right-sided hopeless despair are interesting, since my perception is that you usually come to hopeless despair gradually, as you try and fail and try and fail, and then eventually conclude that the situation is hopeless. As this is happening, both your right-hemisphere intuitive non-cognitive processes and your left-hemisphere logical cognition-based processes are making assessments regarding hope vs hopelessness. Nevertheless, my perception is that the right-sided hopeless despair/shutdown response is fast, once your right-sided intuitive processes finally come to the conclusion that you have no responses worth attempting.

situation, and are therefore stuck in confusion, you need an intervention that specifically addresses your inability to successfully complete level 5 processing tasks. As will be described below, when you are unable to make sense out of a painful situation, the intervention you need is for somebody to perceive where you are confused, and then provide an explanation that leads from your place of confusion to an accurate understanding.

Left hemisphere, cognition-driven emotions: As we begin discussing left-hemisphere emotions, let me first re-cap regarding right-hemisphere emotions. As described above, when we encounter and then move through a new experience, each wave of new information first enters the emotional/social processing system at levels 1 and 2, and as this information is processed, activity in these primitive, rapid response, right-sided neurological structures generates/initiates emotions. Initiated as part of very rapid responses from levels 1 and 2, right-sided emotions can also receive contributions from levels 3 and 4 as they move forward through the emotional/social processing system. Right-sided emotions are generated so quickly that they feel instantaneous; they are generated by involuntary neurological activity, so we do not experience any sense of choice regarding whether or not we will feel these emotions; and they are generated by nonconscious neurological activity, so we are not consciously aware of the underlying processes that produce them. These fast, involuntary, unconsciously driven, right-sided emotions are *not* produced by cognitive beliefs, but rather occur before we have even begun to formulate cognitive interpretations regarding the new information.

After traveling all the way forward on the right side, each wave of new information then crosses over to the left side; left-hemisphere circuits generate language-based cognitions that “make sense” out of the experiences, and that interpret the meaning of the experiences with respect to ourselves; and *cognitive beliefs regarding meaning with respect to ourselves* then travel back to left-sided emotion generating circuits,²⁴ where *left-sided, cognition-based* emotions are produced.

Many aspects of the subjective experience of left-sided emotions are identical/very similar to the subjective experience of the corresponding right-sided emotions. For example, left-sided fear includes many of the same specific components of physical arousal as right-sided fear, and left-sided anger includes many of the same specific components of physical arousal as right-sided anger. But there are also differences. For example, the subjective experience of left-sided “I’m bad” shame always includes embarrassment and feeling like you want to look away and/or hide, whereas the subjective experience of right-sided shame (mis-attunement pain) does not include these. The subjective experience of left-sided “you’re bad” judgmental anger also *feels* different than the subjective experience of right-sided anger, and the subjective experience of left-sided meaning-based hopeless despair *feels* different than the subjective experience of right-sided hopeless despair (the shutdown response).²⁵

²⁴ My current understanding is that these circuits that generate left-sided emotions are the neurological circuits in the left hemisphere that correspond to the circuits that generate right-sided emotions in the right hemisphere. For example, the cingulate cortex on the left contributes to left-sided emotions, and the cingulate cortex on the right contributes to right-sided emotions.

²⁵ I am having trouble finding words to describe exactly how they feel different, but if you are able to untangle these right-sided emotions from their corresponding left-sided emotions, you can *feel* the difference.

The most important difference between right-sided emotions and left-sided emotions is that left-sided emotions are caused by cognitions, based on cognitions, driven by cognitions, and intimately woven together with *cognition-based meaning*. For example, left-sided shame is caused by, based on, driven by, and intimately woven together with some form of the *cognition-based meaning*: “I am bad.” You cannot have left-sided shame without some form of the cognition-based meaning “I am bad,” and left-sided shame will *always* include this cognition-based meaning. Similarly, left-sided hopeless despair is caused by, based on, driven by, and intimately woven together with some form of the *cognition-based meaning*: “It’s hopeless. This situation is going to turn out badly, and there’s nothing I can do about it. I might as well give up trying to solve the problem, and instead focus my attention on accepting the inevitable.” You cannot have left-sided hopeless despair without some form of the cognition-based meaning “It’s hopeless...etc,” and left-sided hopeless despair will *always* include this cognition-based meaning.

One of the most important implications of left-sided emotions being cognition-based and cognition-driven is that we are more *consciously aware* of the processes involved, and we have more opportunity for *voluntary choice* with respect to the processes involved. The circuits that actually generate the emotions are still non-conscious and involuntary. Therefore, just as with right-sided emotions, we are not consciously aware of the neurological processes that produce the actual emotions, and we do not perceive choice regarding whether or not we will feel a left-sided emotion associated with a given cognition, *but we do have conscious awareness and voluntary choices with respect to the cognitions*. If you are aware of these principles and practice careful self-observation, you can learn to consciously perceive the level 5 cognitions – the cognitive beliefs – that drive your left-sided emotions. Furthermore, you can learn to make choices with respect to these cognitions.

For example, let’s say you feel intense anxiety the week before each quarterly performance review, even though your supervisor likes your work and has never been angry with you. If you pay careful attention to the thoughts that feel true when you are experiencing the anxiety, you might notice thoughts such as “I’m never good enough. No matter how hard I work, he’s going to yell at me.” And once you recognize these thoughts, you can make choices with respect to how you respond to them. You can shut down the triggered negative cognitions and associated anxiety by choosing to engage in activities that will intensely focus your attention elsewhere. You can choose to indulge in related negative cognitions and emotions, such as self pity or bitterness. You can choose to manage the triggered cognitions and anxiety by applying various cognitive therapy techniques, such as challenging the negative cognitions with verifiable opposing information (in this case, the fact that your past performance reviews have always been positive, and that your supervisor has never been angry with you). You can challenge the triggered cognitions and anxiety by choosing to focus on corrective scriptures, such as “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done.”²⁶ You can choose to focus on the triggered cognitions and emotions, and then work with Jesus to resolve the underlying unresolved traumatic memories of your perfectionist father being dissatisfied and angry with you, even when you did your best.

²⁶ *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. 1997, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers), Philippians 4:6.

Two of the most important, foundational principles for both cognitive therapy and Theophostic®-based therapy/ministry are that cognitive beliefs create and drive emotions, and that modifying the underlying cognitive beliefs will result in modifying the associated emotions. In case you have not already made this connection, left-sided emotional phenomena are the domain in which these theoretical principles apply – *left-sided emotions are created and driven by cognitive beliefs, and modifying the underlying cognitive beliefs will modify the associated left-sided emotions*. To provide a Theophostic®-based example: if you were molested as a child, and have the distorted belief “I made him do it – I’m bad and dirty” associated with your childhood abuse memories, this distorted, negative belief will drive left-sided shame. You will feel this shame whenever these memories are triggered, and the distorted, negative beliefs are therefore active; and if the Lord enters these memories and replaces “I’m dirty” with “It wasn’t my fault,” the left-sided shame will resolve.

Left-sided emotions are therefore also the domain in which interventions based on these principles are effective. Cognitive therapy interventions are all about becoming consciously aware of the dysfunctional cognitions that drive our dysfunctional emotions, and all about learning to make better choices regarding how to deal with these dysfunctional cognitions. These interventions work for dysfunctional *left-sided* emotions. Theophostic®-based therapy/ministry is all about finding the underlying distorted cognitions that drive dysfunctional emotions, finding the underlying traumatic memories that are the original source of the distorted cognitions, and then permanently resolving the distorted cognitions and associated dysfunctional emotions as part of resolving the underlying traumatic memories. These interventions work for dysfunctional *left-sided* emotions.

In contrast to left-sided emotional phenomena, the principles from cognitive therapy and Theophostic®-based therapy/ministry *do not fit the data when working with right-sided emotions*, and interventions based on these principles *do not work for resolving problems with dysfunctional right-sided emotions*.

Part of the challenge with respect to perceiving right-sided emotions and left-sided emotions as two separate phenomena is that they usually occur together. In actual experience, our left hemispheres usually generate corresponding left-sided emotions within seconds (or even less) of our right hemispheres generating right-sided emotions. Unless you are very self aware, know exactly what to look for, and have practiced making these observations, you will experience the right-sided emotions and left-sided emotions as jumbled together into one subjective emotional experience. For example, if you encounter a situation that generates the right sided hopeless despair/shutdown response, this same situation will usually also trigger left sided hopeless despair, and so left-side hopeless despair cognitions and emotions will usually follow within seconds of the right-sided shutdown response. The right-sided shutdown response will usually be so tangled in with the left-sided cognitions and emotions that you will perceive only a single “hopeless despair” emotional response.

For those who are just learning to identify right-side emotions and left-sided emotions as separate, different phenomena, it can be easier to perceive cognition-based left-sided emotions in situations where emotions are generated directly from cognitions, with no right-sided emotions occurring before the cognition-based left-side emotions are generated. For example, let’s pretend that you’re on a plane, sitting quietly in your seat. The flight attendant has just brought you orange juice, and you’re reading a good novel. There is no immediate

danger threatening you, and therefore your right-sided danger system is quiet. Then the pilot comes over the intercom and says: “I am very sorry to inform you that the maintenance crew forgot to fill our left-side fuel tank before we took off. Unfortunately, we are now flying over 500 miles of wilderness mountains, and will run out of fuel before we reach an area where we could attempt an emergency landing. We will have to crash land in the mountains, and the chances of survival are almost zero. I wanted to let you know so that you could call your families and say ‘goodbye.’”

There is no immediate physical danger, so your level 2 amygdala “fight or flight” circuits will not produce right-sided fear. However, even though nothing has changed with respect to your physical surroundings – you are still sitting in the same seat in the same climate controlled airplane cabin, with your orange juice in one hand and your novel in the other – your cognition-based left-sided emotional system will produce intense fear *based on, caused by,* and *driven by* cognitive beliefs. In spite of the complete absence of danger in your immediate surroundings, you will experience steadily increasing fear as your left hemisphere generates cognitive beliefs along the lines of “In the next couple hours, I will be in a plane crash. The captain just said there is almost no chance of survival, so I will probably die instantly in the crash, or die a slow, horrible death due to injuries from the crash. This is going to be terrifying and painful...etc.” Furthermore, your cognition-based left-sided fear will promptly resolve if the captain comes back on the intercom with: “Very good news folks! I will be able to safely land the plane on the flat surface provided by a large frozen lake that we have just located within range of our fuel supply.” Once again, you will experience a dramatic change in emotions caused entirely by changes in your cognitive beliefs. Situations like this hypothetical example, where your emotional changes are based solely on changes in your cognitive beliefs, are the best place to practice learning to recognize the subjective experience of left-sided emotions.

In most everyday life situations, there is no need to separate right-sided emotions and left-sided emotions; however, understanding the difference is helpful when working with traumatic memories. As will be discussed below, unresolved right-sided emotions indicate a different problem with respect to the pain processing pathway than dysfunctional left-sided emotions, and these two different problems require different interventions. When a person experiences negative left-sided emotions based on distorted cognitive beliefs, he needs somebody to help him set up the conditions necessary to correct the distorted cognitive beliefs that have resulted from flawed level 5 processing.

Summary regarding information flow with respect to emotions: When we encounter and then move through an experience, each wave of new information first enters the emotional/social processing system at levels 1 and 2, and as this information is processed, activity in these right-sided neurological circuits generates/initiates right-sided emotions. These right-sided emotions then join the information that is passing forward to the higher levels. As the waves of information pass forward and upward through the emotional/social processing system, neurological circuits in levels 3 and 4 also make contributions to some of the right-sided emotions. After traveling all the way forward to the level 4 prefrontal cortex on the *right* side, the waves of new information, including the right-sided emotions, pass across to the level 5 *left* prefrontal cortex. As mentioned in the summary of the five levels, one of the most important functions of level 5 is to generate cognitive beliefs that interpret the meaning of the experience with respect to ourselves. These level 5 cognitive beliefs then travel backwards and downwards

to left-sided neurological circuits where left-sided, cognition-based emotions are generated. After being generated by these left-sided circuits, the left-sided emotions then cross over to the right hemisphere, where they join the more recent waves of new information that are then passing forward to levels 3 and 4 on the right side.

Additional comments regarding flow of information and brain level activity: This essay is especially talking about the processing of painful experiences, but all experiences, both painful and pleasant, are actually processed through this same system and through this same pathway. Every moment of every day, the emotional/social processing system receives a steady flow of information from both the external environment and from internal stimuli. In fact, waves of new information move forward through the emotional/social processing system *multiple times each second*. Higher levels of brain function are not “off line” as you are processing new information at the lower levels, but rather are busy processing previous waves of information, and are waiting for the next wave of new information to arrive. The higher levels of the processing system may have trouble functioning optimally if they are getting waves of information that have not been successfully processed at lower levels, but they do not go “off line” while waiting for lower levels to send fully processed material.

For example, if you are in a difficult situation and level 4 has not yet been able to successfully complete its processing tasks, then instead of including the perception that you are able to handle the situation, and the accompanying sense of satisfaction, the information being passed to level 5 will contain the perception that you do not know how to handle the situation, and the accompanying feeling of inadequacy. Level 5 will have difficulty functioning optimally with this information, but it will continue to process the information that gets passed forward to it, doing the best it can with what it gets.

Synchronization vs desynchronization: Synchronization has to do with timing, coordination, and cooperation. For example, in the action movies, the members of the special mission team always synchronize their watches so that they can precisely coordinate the different specific actions that each member of the team is supposed to accomplish. If you have watched any of the *Mission Impossible* movies, you will appreciate how the precise synchronization and coordination between the different team members is extremely important for the success of the mission. Each team member accomplishes a specific task that would have very little effect on its own, but when all of the pieces are combined in a precisely synchronized and coordinated package, they accomplish missions that would otherwise be impossible. This precise synchronization and coordination is an important part of the larger cooperation, or teamwork, that makes special mission teams so effective. If even *one* of the team members failed to synchronize with the rest of the team, the whole mission would fall apart in a hurry.

Sports teams provide another excellent example of synchronization. To be successful, the individual players must cooperate as a team, and one of the most important functions of the coach is to help coordinate and synchronize the efforts of the individual players. Championship teams always display high levels of carefully timed coordination and cooperation that allow them to use complex strategies as a group. As any coach, athlete, or sports fan will tell you, mediocre athletes who coordinate their play in a carefully synchronized team effort can beat desynchronized superstars, where each supposed “team” member is focusing only on his individual performance.

Interpersonal brain synchronization: *Interpersonal brain synchronization* is brain synchronization between two or more people – synchronization between two or more different brains. For example, if I listen while you’re talking, and then you listen while I’m talking, we are socially and behaviorally synchronized. In contrast, we are *not* synchronized if we both talk at the same time. If Charlotte has been away for the weekend at a women’s retreat, we are both looking forward to reconnecting, she comes in the door with an energetic greeting “Hi sweetheart. I’m home!,” and I respond with “I missed you so much” and an affectionate embrace, we are emotionally, socially, and behaviorally synchronized. In contrast, we are *not* synchronized if I go to bed early with the flu while Charlotte stays up to work on a project, and then she comes into the bedroom with an energetic “Hey, I’m done with my project!” just as I have finally gotten to sleep.²⁷ The coordination between the members of special mission teams and sports teams mentioned above are also examples of interpersonal synchronization. Musicians provide one of the best examples of interpersonal synchronization vs desynchronization. In a well-trained orchestra with a skilled conductor, a large number of musicians can play together in a very complex way, with different individuals playing different parts, and some individuals playing softly while others play loudly, *but if they are synchronized you get beautiful music*. However, if these same musicians all play at the same time and are *not* synchronized, you get incredibly unpleasant chaotic noise.

And if people are emotionally, socially, or behaviorally synchronized in some way, then their brains are also synchronized in some way. Because of the incredibly intimate brain/mind connection, you cannot have your minds emotionally, socially, or behaviorally synchronized without also having your biological brains synchronized, and you cannot have your brains synchronized without also having your minds emotionally, socially, or behaviorally synchronized in some way. Not only does this make sense in light of the intimate brain/mind connection, but you can also demonstrate interpersonal brain/mind synchronization in the lab. The emotional/social processing systems in our brains contain elaborate neurological machinery for synchronizing with other brains, and neuropsychologists can actually demonstrate that as you synchronize with another person emotionally, socially, and behaviorally, the chemical and electrical activity in your brain synchronizes with the chemical and electrical activity in her brain.²⁸

Intrapersonal brain synchronization: *Intrapersonal brain synchronization* is synchronization within yourself – synchronization between the different parts of your brain. Just as a basketball team functions best when the five different players are cooperating and synchronized in a coordinated team effort, your brain and mind function best when the five different levels of your emotional/social processing system are cooperating and synchronized

²⁷ I want to thank Jim Wilder and Chris Coursey for these two excellent examples of synchronization vs desynchronization. For a much more detailed discussion of synchronization and desynchronization, see *Thriving*, by Dr. E. James Wilder & Chris Coursey (as of 3/2007 this book is still in process, but the first chapter can be obtained at <http://www.lifemodel.org/download.php?type=article&rn=32>).

²⁸ One of the most fascinating developments regarding the synchronization of our biological brains has been the discovery of “mirror neurons” – nerve cells in our pre-motor cortices that seem to be especially involved with the interpersonal synchronization of our physical behavior and emotions. For a recent review regarding mirror neurons, see Iacoboni, Marco, “Face to face: The neural basis of social mirroring and empathy,” *Psychiatric Annals*, April 2007, Vol. 37, No. 4, pages 236-241.

in a coordinated team effort. When the five levels are synchronized, your brain and mind work as they were designed to work. And just as the function of a basketball team progressively deteriorates as the different players become increasingly desynchronized from each other, the function of your brain and mind progressively deteriorates as the different levels become increasingly desynchronized from each other.

Interpersonal attunement and mutual mind: Interpersonal attunement is a special form of interpersonal brain/mind synchronization. When I am attuning to you, I *want* to perceive and understand your internal experience, and I focus my attention on you, with my mind and brain especially focused on your facial expressions and all other nonverbal signals that will help me to perceive your internal experience. As I do this, it is helpful for the logical analytical circuits on the left side of my brain to understand what I am trying to do, but intuitive circuits on the right side of my brain, *especially designed for just this kind of emotional and social perception*, are much more important.

When I am attuning to you I am also seeking to perceive and understand your internal experience *so that I can share it with you and join you in it*. This is an inherent, necessary part of attunement. I am not trying to understand your internal experience so that I can figure out the best way to manage or manipulate you,²⁹ but rather so that I can share it with you and join you in it. And when I do this – when I try to perceive your internal experience with the goal of attunement – emotional resonance will result in at least some degree of experiencing the same emotional state. Since we all have memories for the same universally encountered emotional experiences, if I see you experiencing one of these emotional states, resonance with your experience will at least partially activate my memories of feeling the same emotional state. As this resonance triggering activates my memories, I will also feel the same subjective emotional state. In addition to this resonance memory phenomena, there are special nerve cells called *mirror neurons* that seem to be specially designed to help us both *perceive* and *share* the emotional experiences we see on the face of another person.³⁰ Part of my empathy, part of my synchronization with you, part of my emotional resonance with you, part of my *attunement* to you will be to share the same emotional experience you are feeling. I may not experience the emotional state with the same intensity, but I will have some subjective experience of the same emotional state.

Another necessary component of attunement is being glad to be with the person. This has never been mentioned in any of the professional literature I have read regarding attunement, but my perception is that attunement is inherently about caring for the other person, and must always include *being glad to be with the person you are attuning to*. You can be feeling the same emotions at the same time and in the same place, but if you are not glad to be with the other person, then it is not really about caring for her, and therefore not really attunement. You can even be intentionally focusing on the other person, correctly understanding her, sharing her emotions, and trying to communicate that you are with her, but if you are not truly glad to be

²⁹ For example, a card player will try to perceive your internal experience in order to tell whether or not you are bluffing, a politician will try to perceive your internal experience in order to figure out what he can say to get your support, and a car salesman will try to perceive your internal experience in order to tell how much discount he needs to offer in order to close the deal.

³⁰ For a recent summary discussion of this fascinating mirror neuron system, see Iacoboni, Marco, “Face to face: The neural basis of social mirroring and empathy,” *Psychiatric Annals*, April 2007, Vol. 37, No. 4, pages 236-241.

with her, then your relational initiative is not really about caring for her. You may *appear* to be attuning, but you are actually using *pseudo*-attunement to manage the other person in some way.³¹ Again, my perception is that true attunement is inherently about caring for the other person, and that it must always include being glad to be with the person you are attuning to.

Furthermore, the goal of attunement is not just for me to perceive your internal experience, share your internal experience, join you in your internal experience, and be glad to be with you, but also for *you to be aware of and feel* this attunement. In fact, the *most important* goal of attunement is for you to *feel felt* – for you to be aware of and *feel* that I see, understand, and care about your internal experience, for you to be aware of and *feel* that I am sharing your internal experience, for you to be aware of and *feel* that I am joining you in your internal experience, and for you to be aware of and *feel* that I am glad to be with you. Therefore, when I am attuning to you I am also trying to communicate that I understand your internal experience, that I am sharing it with you, that I am joining you in it, and that I am glad to be with you. If I am successful and attunement occurs, you will perceive that I see you and correctly understand your internal emotional experience, that I care about your experience, that I am sharing your emotional state, that I am joining you in your emotional experience, and that I am glad to be with you; *and you will have the subjective experience of feeling that I am with you.*

When attunement – this special form of interpersonal synchronization – occurs, our brains and minds are functionally linked as our synchronized brains affect each other biologically and as our synchronized minds affect each other psychologically. “Mutual mind” refers not only to feeling the same emotion, but also to how we are actually sharing a *functionally joined brain/mind experience.*

So what happens if we get together and I am feeling excited and happy, but you are feeling discouraged and sad? We can’t have a mutual mind shared experience of being *both* excited and happy *and* discouraged and sad at the same time. If I attune to you, we have a mutual mind experience where we share *your* initial emotional state; whereas if you attune to me, we have a mutual mind experience where we share *my* initial emotional state. If we both have at least adult maturity, it will be easy and satisfying to “share” (we can go back and forth with respect to who “receives” the attunement).³²

³¹ This is not necessarily always bad. For example, you might be working on a psychiatric ward, talking to a suicidal patient who is holding a razor blade to his throat. Even if you are tired, triggered, and *not* glad to be with this patient, an appropriate intervention may still be focusing on him, trying to understand his internal experience, sympathizing with his despair, and trying to communicate that you are with him. True attunement would be even more effective, since the other person can usually (always?) tell whether or not you are glad to be with him, but it would still be appropriate to use pseudo-attunement if it’s all that you have to offer.

³² Those familiar with Life Model and THRIVE teaching on maturity will appreciate additional thoughts regarding attunement and maturity: If I am at infant maturity, I want you to attune to me, and it feels very good when you attune to me, but it does not even occur to me that I should then also attune to you. If I am at child maturity, I want you to attune to me, it feels very good when you attune to me, and I can attune to you *after* you have attuned to me. If I am at adult maturity, I want you to attune to me, it feels very good when you attune to me, I am aware that it is just as important for me to attune to you as it is for you to attune to me, and I am okay attuning to you first as long as I also get cared for eventually. If I am at parent maturity and you are my child, I will find it satisfying to attune to you even if you don’t attune to me. If I am at elder maturity, I will find it satisfying to attune to you even if you don’t attune to

The level 3 cingulate cortex is the part of your brain that your mind/spirit uses to mediate attuned relational connection.

Attachment: Emotional attachment, or bonding, is one of the most important phenomena in our emotional and social experience. Emotional attachment/bonding is the deep, enduring emotional connection between ourselves and specific people that we know and that are important to us. The level 1 circuits situated deep in the core of our brain are the neurological circuits that our mind/spirit uses to mediate attachment. These level 1 attachment circuits are present at birth, and immediately embrace the task of bonding to our primary caregivers. All children internalize their attachment experiences with their parents (primary care-givers), and these internalized parental attachments then serve as the foundation for all future relationships.

When our attachments/bonds are joy based, we want to be near the people we are attached to, and we go to them for comfort and protection in times of distress.

One way to get an intuitive feel for attachment is to think about the similarities and differences between your relationships with the fuel pumps at your local gas station and your relationships with your closest family and friends. You're familiar with the fuel pumps at your local gas station. You get something from them and depend on them. You visit and interact with them on a regular basis. Similarly, you are familiar with your parents, your siblings, your spouse, your children, and your closest friends. You get something from them and depend on them. You visit and interact with them on a regular basis.

However, there is no emotional attachment in your relationship with the fuel pumps or the gas station. Your relationship with the fuel pumps is purely utilitarian, with no emotional connection. You do *not* experience an especially intense joy when you see these *particular* pumps. After you have been on vacation, traveling on interstate 80 from Chicago to New York and relating to fuel pumps that are strangers, you don't come back to your local station and greet your old friends with "I'm so glad to see you! I missed you so much!" And you would *not* be sad or upset if you lost these *particular* pumps. If you drove up tomorrow and the familiar BP pumps had been replaced by Shell pumps, you wouldn't feel any sense of loss or distress (as long as the prices stayed the same). If the whole station had been torn down and was being replaced by a grocery store, your only distress would be in finding another gas station with comparable prices and that was also conveniently close. If your next-door neighbor suggested: "Don't worry about the station at Oakton and Dodge. They're putting up a new station that will be even closer – right at Main and Ridge," you would transfer your business to the new station without the least bit of emotional distress.

In contrast, there is deep, enduring, powerful emotional attachment in your relationships with your parents, siblings, spouse, children, and closest friends. You *do* experience an especially intense joy when you see these *particular* people. When you are away from home for several weeks on a business trip, you experience small flashes of joy when strangers greet you with a smile, but this is not the same as being with your closest friends and family. The longer you are away, the more you miss them; and when you finally come back home, you *do* greet your friends, your spouse, and your children with "I am *so* glad to see you! I missed you *so much*!" And you *would* be sad and upset if you lost these *particular* people. If your closest friend was dying of

me, regardless of whether or not you are one of my own children.

cancer, you would probably not respond with “Oh well, I can always find another best friend after Sarah dies.” If you got a phone call tomorrow telling you that your husband and children had just died in a car accident, it would rock your world. You would experience such intense grief and distress that it would be difficult for you to function, and you would think she was insane if your next-door neighbor suggested: “Don’t worry about your family. There are kids across the street that you can play with, and I have a friend about your age who’s looking for a date.”

You do get utilitarian benefits from your close personal relationships, but these utilitarian benefits are much less important than the emotional connection. For example, it is nice to have your husband wash the dishes, mow the lawn, and maintain the car, but these utilitarian benefits are much less important than the deep, enduring, profound emotional connection at the heart of your relationship with your husband.

Level 1 attachment vs level 3 attuned relational connection: Some who have read early drafts of this essay have asked: “What’s the difference between level 1 mediating attachment, and level 3 mediating relational connection? They sound like the same thing to me.” Your level 1 circuits mediate the *deep, enduring* emotional bonds of attachment, that are *relatively stable over time*, and that exist between people with *ongoing, long term relationships*. For example, the deep, enduring emotional bonds of attachment develop between you and your parents throughout the course of your childhood. You can have a painful argument with your parents that results in months of difficulty relating to them, but this temporary conflict will have no noticeable effect on the underlying, longstanding attachment that forms the foundation of your relationship. And you can move to another state, and only visit your parents for a week each year over Christmas, but these long separations will have little affect on the underlying, longstanding attachment that forms the foundation of your relationship.

In contrast, your level 3 circuits mediate attuned relational connection, which is a very important phenomena, but a phenomena that *often changes dramatically from one minute to the next*. For example, let’s say your wife gets home at 7:00 p.m. after a long day of work. You might start the evening with 25 minutes of strong attuned relational connection as you serve her dinner and empathize with her about a difficult encounter she had with her supervisor this afternoon. But then you suddenly lose attunement when she makes a comment that triggers an unresolved traumatic memory, and this is followed by suffering through 37 minutes of misattunement as you mistakenly transfer the thoughts and emotions from the unresolved memory onto her. You might then return to attuned relational connection over the next 43 minutes as she helps you work with Jesus to find and resolve the underlying memory that is the true source of your negative thoughts and emotions. In the course of an evening you can establish attunement, lose attunement, experience painful misattunement, and then re-establish attunement – all between 7:00 and 8:45 (you still have time to finish the dishes and get through a few chapters of the book you have been reading together).

Furthermore, whereas the deep, enduring bonds of attachment only grow between people with ongoing, long term relationships, attuned relational connection can occur between people who have been married for 27 years and between people who have known each other for less than five minutes. For example, you can be walking through the park and see a child fall and scrape her knees. Even though you have never met this kid before, you can pick her up and help her brush herself off. If she’s four years old, frightened, and crying, you can establish attuned relational

connection fairly easily: “Are you okay?” She nods yes, but she’s still crying, and still looks frightened. Your mirror neurons spontaneously produce a mild reflection of her fear on your face, and you comment: “Boy, I bet falling like that and scraping your knees scared you a bit, didn’t it?” She nods some more, and cries some more. You continue with: “When I was four, I got scared and cried when I fell and scraped my knees. It’s okay to cry a little bit when you get scared like that. I’ll just stay here with you for a few minutes until you’re okay.” She nods some more, cries for another few seconds, and then begins to quiet down. In a minute or two she flashes you a shy smile, says “I’m okay now,” and then runs off without thinking to thank you. Even though you had never seen her before, you may never see her again, and she may not even remember the event two weeks later, you were able to establish attuned relational connection in the course of this brief encounter.

Different forms of attachment (sometimes referred to as different attachment “styles”):

Secure attachment: Secure attachment is established by repeated experiences of having your parents attune to you (see you, understand you, share your emotions, join you in your experience, be glad to be with you), and respond appropriately to the unique situations you bring to them. In a relationship with secure attachment, you *feel* seen, understood, felt, loved, connected, and relationally safe. You feel safe to share your heart with vulnerability and transparency, with the expectation that the other person will see you, understand you, attune to you, and respond appropriately to what you share. In a relationship with secure attachment, you are aware that conflict can arise, but you are confident that problems can be resolved. You have a deep, subjective, intuitive *feeling* that the relationship is safe and stable. In a relationship with secure attachment, you have a deep, subjective sense of security that emotional connection and attunement will be available when you need them.

If your parents do *not* consistently attune to you and respond appropriately to you, then instead of developing secure attachment you will develop one or more of the forms of insecure attachment.

Dismissive attachment: Dismissive attachment is established by repeated experiences of having your parents ignore you, reject you, dismiss the importance of emotional connection, or disparage the importance of emotional connection. For example, if you are growing up in an emotional desert of being persistently ignored and/or rejected, you can come to the self-protective conclusion: “If I can’t get it, it won’t hurt so bad if I don’t need it or want it.” You then try to teach yourself, both consciously and unconsciously, to not need or want emotional connection. In most cases, you develop dismissive attachment because your parents have predominantly dismissive attachment. If this is the case, they will make it much easier for you to adopt this same form of attachment. In addition to ignoring and/or rejecting your attempts to connect with them, they will model dismissive attachment by appearing not to need or want emotional connection – they won’t initiate emotional intimacy, they won’t ask for it, and they won’t express distress at not having it. Sometimes they will make it even easier by explicitly dismissing and/or disparaging the importance of emotional connection, with comments such as: “Don’t come cryin’ to me. If I came home crying, my father would whip me till I stopped. If you’re gonna cry, go to your room till you’re done,” or “What do you want a hug for? Only sissies and fagots need hugs.” Or they might pick up a book such as *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, and comment “All that touchy-feely therapy crap is just a waste of time and money.”

In a relationship with dismissive attachment, you do *not* feel felt, seen, understood, or connected. You have the sense that if you share your heart with vulnerability and transparency, the other person will ignore or disparage your attempt to initiate emotional intimacy (as opposed to see you, understand you, attune to you, and respond appropriately to what you share). In a relationship with dismissive attachment, you have a deep, subjective, intuitive *feeling* that emotional intimacy is not seen as important, and that your needs for relational connection will be ignored or disparaged.

Distracted attachment: Distracted attachment is established by repeated experiences of having your parents be unpredictable with respect to relational, emotional connection. On some occasions when you come to them with the need and desire for emotional connection, they see you, understand you, share your emotions, join you in your experience, want to be with you, and respond appropriately to the situation you are bringing to them. However, on other occasions when you come to them with the need and desire for emotional connection, they are distracted and emotionally unavailable. In these situations, they might pretend to be with you and attune to you, but you can tell that they are not fully present – you can tell that they are not really attuning to you, and they do not respond with what you need for the unique situation you are bringing to them.

In a relationship with distracted attachment, you know what you are looking for and you know that it's possible, but on any given occasion you don't know whether or not you will get the attuned emotional connection that you need. In a relationship with distracted attachment, you never know what you are going to get – you cannot *depend* on the person for attuned connection. In a relationship with distracted attachment, you have a deep, subjective sense of insecurity regarding whether attuned emotional connection will be available when you need it.

One especially noticeable phenomena in people with distracted attachment is that they live in a state of chronic anxiety about relationships, and are preoccupied with getting more attuned relational connection. Our relationship with food can provide an analogy to help us understand this aspect of distracted attachment. If adequate food is always available at meal times, you eat until you are satisfied when you sit down for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and then you don't worry about food between meals. Food does not take up space except when you are hungry. You don't walk around all day thinking and worrying about food. In contrast, research and case studies indicate a very different pattern for people who have had an experience where food was chronically inadequate or inconsistent. If you never know what to expect with respect to food, and sometimes go hungry for extended periods, then you will think and worry about food all the time. You will begin to worry about food immediately after finishing a good meal – *even while you are still fully satisfied from the meal you just ate, you will start to think and worry about the next meal because you don't know whether or not it will be in place when you need it.*³³ As mentioned above, people with distracted attachment have a deep, subjective sense of insecurity regarding when they will get their next “meal” with respect to attuned relational connection. They are therefore chronically anxious about relationships, and preoccupied with getting more attuned relational connection.

³³ For a poignant example of this “distracted attachment” with respect to food, see the story of WWII orphans included on page one of Linn, Dennis; Linn, Sheila Fabricant-Linn; and Linn, Matthew, *Sleeping with Bread* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press), 1995.

Disorganized attachment: Disorganized attachment is established by repeated experiences of a primary care-giver doing things that are overwhelming, frightening, and chaotic – experiences where the primary care-giver that you want to go to for comfort and safety is actually the source of your distress. When this happens, you *simultaneously* experience *both* an intense attachment drive to be with the person who is your primary care-giver *and* an intense self protection drive to get away from this same person as the source of your distress. In a relationship with disorganized attachment, you feel that you need to be with the person, *and* that you need to get away from the person. You feel that something terrible will happen if you leave the person, *and* that something terrible will happen if you stay with them. In a relationship with disorganized attachment, you feel that you must stay with the person to be okay, *and* you know the person is unsafe and will hurt you. In any experience or memory that includes the disorganized attachment dilemma (the person you need to comfort and protect you is the source of your distress), in addition to feeling fearful you will also feel profoundly confused and disorganized.

Note: It is important to understand that you can experience different forms of attachment as you relate to different people. For example, you can have a secure attachment to your mother and a dismissive attachment to your father. If this is the case, when you interact with your mother you will relate to her from a foundation of secure attachment, but when you interact with your father you will relate from a foundation of dismissive attachment. You can also have more than one form of attachment with the same person. For example, you can have a secure attachment to your mother when she is not triggered, but a distracted attachment to your mother when she is triggered to an anxious, emotionally absent place; and you can have a secure attachment to your father when he is sober, but a disorganized attachment to your father when he is intoxicated and violent. If this is the case, when your mother is not triggered you will relate to her from a foundation of secure attachment, but when she becomes triggered and emotionally absent you will shift to distracted attachment; and when your father is sober you will relate to him from a foundation of secure attachment, but when he gets drunk you will shift to disorganized attachment.

The underlying principle here is that your brain/mind will come up with more complex, customized attachment style combinations to fit any patterns that are consistent enough to be useful. For example, if your Dad almost always relates to you in one particular way your brain/mind will develop a single most appropriate attachment style and then apply this set of “most effective responses” all the time. However, if your Dad is usually a life-giving resource when he is sober, but usually dangerous when he is drunk, this is a pattern that is consistent enough to be useful. In this situation it would be more adaptive to develop two different sets of responses, one for sober and one for drunk, so that you could benefit from the life-giving connection when he is sober but avoid harm when he is drunk. In contrast to this adaptive response that your brain/mind actually would implement, think about how things would turn out if you had only one set of responses available: if your only response is “try to be with Dad,” you would benefit from positive resources when he is sober but get beaten up when he is drunk; on the other hand, if your only response is “try to avoid Dad,” you would benefit by escaping harm when he is drunk but then miss valuable resources when he is sober.

Immanuel thoughts regarding attachment: Jesus is *always* with you, and His Immanuel presence provides the perfect conditions for building secure attachment. You can turn to Him and have complete confidence that He will be there, and that He will see you, understand you, care

about you, share your emotions, join you in your experience, be glad to be with you, and respond appropriately to the unique situations you are bringing to Him. If you do not yet have secure attachment with Jesus, perceiving the Lord's presence and connecting with Him will provide the perfect conditions for building secure attachment. If you already have a secure attachment with Jesus, then you can turn to Him for comfort, support, and attunement at any time, regarding any problem that you might encounter.

Relational connection joy: According to Dr. Allen Schore, Dr. Daniel Siegel, Dr. E. James Wilder, and others, one of the earliest and most important sources of joy is the infant seeing "I think you're wonderful and I'm glad to be with you" in the expression on her mother's³⁴ smiling face. In fact, this expression on the mother's face causes the infant's brain to release high levels of endorphins, and these endorphins contribute to the intensely positive joy experience by directly stimulating the infant's subcortical reward centers.³⁵ This intensely positive experience, repeated many times during infancy, builds the joy foundation for the person's life.

As the infant builds a growing memory bank of attuned, "I'm glad to be with you" experiences, she internalizes the important "I'm glad to be with you" relationships in her life. This allows her to carry these relational connections with her, so that she can stand on a foundation of attuned, "I'm glad to be with you" relational connection, and the consequent relational connection joy, even when she is alone. When an infant receives optimal care, and her brain/mind/spirit system therefore develops as the Lord intended, she will carry with her a deep, stable, memory-anchored awareness that there are others who know her, love her, and are glad to be with her; and the corresponding relational connection joy will be the background, baseline, and foundation for every other aspect of her life.

It is important to understand that joy is also a psychological and spiritual phenomena, in addition to the biological phenomena produced by the neurological circuits at level 1 of the social/emotional processing system. For the purposes of this discussion we are *defining* joy as the biological, psychological, and spiritual experience produced when you are in attuned relational connection with another person, and you can perceive from the expression on the person's face that she is *glad to be with you*. Note also that this relational, right-hemisphere joy is not the same thing as pleasure, fun, or happiness. This relational, right-hemisphere joy can be *associated* with pleasure, fun, and happiness – people who are joyful are often also happy, having fun, and experiencing pleasure, and people who are happy, having fun, and experiencing pleasure are often also joyful – but joy is not the same thing as happiness, fun, or pleasure. I will often refer to this relational, right-hemisphere joy as "**relational connection joy**," as a way to remind the reader that this joy is *inherently* connected to relationship, and that we are not using joy simply as a synonym for pleasure, fun, or happiness.

"Returning to joy"/re-establishing attuned relational connection/recovering the relational aspect of yourself: Developmental neuropsychologists tell us that the brain of an infant is a strange place, and one of the strangest things about this strange place is the striking lack of

³⁴ This foundational infant bonding joy comes from the "I think you're wonderful and I'm glad to be with you" connection with both parents, but it is most powerful and most important with the primary care-giver, and the primary care-giver is usually the mother.

³⁵ Schore, Allen N., Ph.D. *Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self*. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company), 2003, page 10.

connection between many of the neurological circuits that are intimately connected in the properly developed adult brain. For example, the infant's brain starts out with minimal connections between the rest of the social/emotional processing system and the neurological circuits that generate each of the basic right-sided negative emotions. With respect to the rest of the social/emotional processing system, the circuits that generate each of the basic right-sided negative emotions are essentially neurological islands, *so that when the infant experiences one of the right-sided negative emotions, he is temporarily isolated on the corresponding neurological island.*

This neurology has profound implications, one of which is the following: when an infant at this stage of development encounters some painful experience that causes him to feel a negative emotion, and he is therefore isolated on the neurological island that generates the negative emotion in question, *he temporarily loses access to the neurological circuits that mediate attuned relational connection and relational connection joy.* When this happens, he loses all awareness that there are external others that know him, love him, and are glad to be with him. Instead of perceiving Mom's attunement and "glad to be with you," and feeling relational connection joy, the infant's conscious awareness is filled only with the painful emotion. The painful emotion is the only thing that lives or happens on its neurological island, and when the infant is isolated on this island, the painful emotion fills the whole screen of his conscious awareness.

Furthermore, when the infant loses access to the neurological circuits that mediate relational connection, he not only loses attuned relational connection and relational connection joy as emotional resources, but he also temporarily *loses the relational aspect of his self.* That is, the neurological circuits that mediate relational connection joy are the neurological circuits that mediate the relational aspect of his self, and *when he loses access to these circuits, he becomes an essentially non-relational being.* He will not be participating in attuned relational connection with its mutual mind or experiencing relational connection joy. He will be *neurologically unable* to think relationally towards others – he will not be interested in or concerned about what others are thinking or feeling, and he will certainly not be interested in or concerned about initiating attunement towards others. He will not even be thinking about others attuning to him, unless he actually sees them, right in front of him, appearing to understand him, sharing his negative emotions, joining him in his distress, and being glad to be with him (initiating and offering attunement).³⁶

Losing access to your relational connection circuits is a really important concept, and since most of us can't remember these infant experiences of getting stranded on negative emotion neurological islands, I'd like to provide some adult life examples that will help you get a better feel for what this looks like. The experience of drowning provides one of the most dramatic examples. Everyone knows that you must be careful when trying to help someone who is drowning because he can pull you under in his frantic attempt to climb to the surface, and he will be completely oblivious to the fact that he is drowning you in the process. You never hear anyone say: "When you're trying to rescue a drowning person, make sure to tell him that you're his friend so that he won't pull you under," or "..., but you don't have to worry about this if the

³⁶ Even when you are alone on a neurological negative emotion island, you will still welcome and respond to someone else coming to you with attunement. In this respect, you are still a relational being, but aside from this remaining openness to connection, you become non-relational when you are isolated on one of the neurological islands that produce negative emotions.

person drowning is a close relative because no one will do this to his own family members.” The reason for this universally accepted wisdom with respect to drowning victims is that a person overwhelmed by the suffocation and terror of drowning will usually lose access to his relational connection circuits to such an extreme degree that he will become *completely and totally non-relational*. When this happens, self-preservation is the only thing left on the screen. The only awareness he will have with respect to anyone else in the water is that they are floating objects he can climb onto.

I experienced this “completely and totally non-relational” phenomena first hand when I almost drowned as an eight year old. I was a good swimmer, and could usually take care of myself in water without any difficulty, but on this occasion I was being pulled down by an undercurrent. I could see the surface, but I couldn’t get to it no matter how hard I tried, and as the sense of suffocation steadily increased, fear became panic, and panic quickly grew into the most desperate, overwhelming terror I have ever experienced in my life. At this point self-preservation definitely filled the whole screen for me. My brother was with me, struggling with the same dangerous current, and my father was on the shore, watching both his sons fighting for their lives; but I was not grateful for their presence, I did not perceive them as sources of joy, I did not feel connected to them or even feel the desire for connection, and I was not concerned about what they were thinking or feeling. In fact, I had forgotten they even existed. The **ONLY** thing on my screen was suffocation and terror. If I had bumped into my brother, I’m sure I would have pulled him under in an attempt to climb his body to the surface.

I’ve never heard anybody describe this, but if you *were* able to maintain access to your relational connection circuits while drowning it might look like this: Even as you are feeling intense suffocation and terror, you would be able to hold onto the awareness that there are others that know you and love you. You would still feel terror and the intense pain of suffocation, but you would *also* be able to hold onto the truth that the Lord, your family, and your friends love you, and you would be able to *feel* the value of these relational connections. Furthermore, if there are others in the water with you, you will *feel* grateful for their presence and you will *feel* concern for their safety. You will still have a desperate desire for them to help you, but you will *also* be aware of them as people, *feel* concern for their safety, and be careful not to grab onto them in ways that would cause them to drown.

The dramatic scenario of drowning illustrates the phenomena with particular clarity, but it is also important to realize that we can lose access to our relational connection circuits in much more mundane situations. This is especially true when relatively mild painful emotions are not *directly* causing us to lose access to our relational connection circuits, but rather *indirectly* cause this problem by triggering traumatic memories whose unresolved content includes loss of relational connection. For example, at one point in the seminar we did two months ago in California Charlotte and I lost synchronization between the PowerPoint slides she was running and the lecture content I was presenting, and this triggered memories of being a child with dyslexia in first grade, where I would “mess up” in front of the class on a regular basis. I suddenly felt off balance, anxious, embarrassed, and especially vulnerable to making mistakes that might cause the audience to laugh at me or become angry with me. And even though the vulnerability, anxiety, and embarrassment I felt in front of the audience in California were only of mild-moderate intensity, I lost access to my relational connection circuits *because the underlying memories included loss of access to my relational connection circuits*. To the extent that I was blended with the first grade memory content, I experienced impaired access to my relational

connection circuits in the present.

To the extent that I had become non-relational, it was all about making the pain stop in the present and protecting myself from similar pain in the future. My perception was that Charlotte had become confused regarding which slide should be on the screen because she had lost her place in the notes due to lack of attention. It *felt* true that the problem was her fault, it *felt* true that I would have done a better job had I been running the PowerPoints, it felt true that there was no excuse for her lapse in attention, and it felt true that applying pain would be an acceptable part of the solution. It felt reasonable to point my displeasure at her to motivate maximum effort for getting back on track, and it felt reasonable to apply additional displeasure so that she would be motivated to pay closer attention in the future. I was *not* aware of her as another person. I did *not* feel glad to be with her. I did *not* feel that I was connected to her or that I had any desire to be connected to her. I did *not* perceive her presence as a source of joy, but rather as a problem to be solved or a resource to be used. I did *not* have any awareness of her true heart, and I did *not* feel any concern regarding what she might be thinking or feeling.³⁷

Note: When I lose access to my relational connection circuits, I do not just spontaneously become as clearly and explicitly aware of these thoughts and feelings as I am describing here. However, if I stop and carefully examined my thoughts and feelings, this is what I find. Similarly, when you lose access to your relational connection circuits, if you stop and carefully examine your mental content, this is the kind of stuff you will find.

Note also that it's not about knowing what I *ought* to think and feel towards Charlotte, it's not about knowing how I *ought* to act towards Charlotte, and it's not about being aware of the kind of consequences that might ensue should I act on my hurtful, non-relational impulses. All of these protective, higher level brain functions were still at least partially on line for me (for example, they were on line enough to enable me to make good choices regarding my outward behavior). Rather, loss of my relational connection circuits is about the thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and impulses towards other people that come forward *spontaneously* and *involuntarily*, and that *feel* true.

Later in this same presentation I was talking about losing access to relational connection circuits, and it occurred to me that I could use this very recent relational tangle as an example. I noted the synchronization difficulty that had occurred 15 minutes previous, I pointed out the irritated, judgmental edge to my voice as I was interacting with Charlotte to regain coordination between lecture and slides, and then I described the internal thoughts and emotions I had been experiencing, all of which provided examples of what it looks like when you lose access to your relational connection circuits. At this point my relational connection circuits were still mostly off line, and I still felt more frustration and irritation than appreciation, but it was important for Charlotte, the audience, and myself that I take some time to deliberately focus on and name the specific ways in which Charlotte was doing an excellent job in her role as support staff, and I chose to do this. Among other things, I noted the high quality of the PowerPoint slides Charlotte had spent many, many hours putting together, and I noted the difficulty of maintaining constant focus with respect to cues for hundreds and hundreds of slides over 16+ hours of lecture content.

³⁷ Actually, I *was* concerned about what she was thinking and feeling, in a totally non-relational sort of way. I wanted her to be feeling enough pain to provide adequate motivation, and I hoped she was thinking: "Boy, this really hurts – I'll make sure to never let this happen again!"

By the time I got done naming all of these reasons I should appreciate Charlotte, they had begun to *feel* true, indicating that my relational connection circuits were back on line. Once I had recovered the relational aspect of my self, I was aware of Charlotte as a person, I was aware of her heart, I perceived her presence as a source of joy, I *felt* connected to her, I *wanted* to be connected to her, and I could *feel* concern for how she was doing; *and all this came forth spontaneously, without my having to specifically think about it or work on it.* I still felt my anxiety and vulnerability, I still believed (erroneously)³⁸ that the problem had resulted from a loss of focus on her part, and I still wanted to resolve the underlying issues so that this same problem would not happen again, but I *also* felt relational and felt spontaneous concern for Charlotte. My spontaneous, involuntary response was now to *feel* concern for her, and to want to resolve the underlying issues in a considerate, gentle way that would avoid hurting her.

Getting back to the infant with the neurologically immature brain: At this early stage of development, with the neurological circuits isolated as just described, the infant is unable to feel negative emotions and access her relational circuits at the same time. For this to change, the infant's brain needs to be trained, so that neurological bridges will develop between the circuits that generate negative emotions and the circuits that mediate relational connection. The infant needs to learn the right-hemisphere, *psychological/spiritual maturity skill* of being able to feel negative emotions and maintain the relational aspect of her self at the same time, and the mind/spirit process of learning this skill will correspond to the brain process of growing and strengthening neurological connections between the circuits that generate negative emotions and the circuits that mediate relational connection.

So how does this brain training and skill learning occur? As just described, before this brain training and skill learning has occurred, experiencing a negative emotion causes the infant to lose access to her relational connection circuits, and this corresponds to losing the relational aspect of her self, losing attuned relational connection, and losing relational connection joy. When this happens, the infant needs to regain access to her relational connection circuits, she needs to re-establish attuned relational connection, she needs to return to relational connection joy,³⁹ she needs to recover the relational aspect of her self,⁴⁰ and she will need someone to help her do this.

Fortunately, the Lord seems to have designed us so that all of this will happen smoothly and

³⁸ Part of the irony of this whole episode is that the problem had actually *not* been caused by Charlotte losing focus. She had been carefully following her copy of my lecture notes, *but I had made a number of extemporaneous changes to the presentation*, making it impossible for her to figure out which slides should be on the screen.

³⁹ “*Returning to joy*” refers to returning to the original baseline of relational connection joy, after having temporarily lost this due to being isolated in negative emotion circuits. However, “returning to joy” does *not* imply leaving the negative emotion, in the way “returning to Pittsburgh” assumes that you *leave* Chicago and *end up* in Pittsburgh. The core phenomena that drives this brain training and skill learning, and the corresponding neurological development, is returning to the original baseline of relational connection joy *while also remaining in the negative emotion*. Note also that “returning to joy” is a good phrase for the *training phase*, but not for the final maturity skill, which is the ability to *maintain* joy.

⁴⁰ Note that regaining access to your relational connection circuits, re-establishing attuned relational connection, returning to relational connection joy, and recovering the relational aspect of your self always, inherently, go together *because these are all different aspects of the exact same process*.

easily within the normal parent-child interactions of secure attachment. In the context of secure attachment, when an infant encounters a painful situation and is feeling a negative emotion, one of her parents will see and understand her pain, and then initiate attunement by sharing the infant's negative emotion, joining the infant in her negative emotion, and being glad to be with her. When the parent comes into the infant's experience of the negative emotion in this way – finding her and joining her on her negative emotion neurological island – the infant is able to re-establish relational connection *even as she is still in the negative emotion*. The infant responds to her parent's attunement initiative, regains access to her relational connection circuits, recovers the relational aspect of her self, and re-establishes mutual mind connection. And as she is re-establishing mutual mind attuned connection and sharing her negative emotions with her parent – as she is *feeling* seen, understood, validated, cared for, and emotionally connected *while still in the negative emotions* – she is also receiving the “I'm glad to be with you” message, and thereby re-establishing the joy experience of being glad to be with her parent who is glad to be with her.

Each time the infant feels a negative emotion, and then is helped to regain access to her relational connection circuits⁴¹ *while still feeling the negative emotion*, neurons linking the negative emotion circuits to the relational connection circuits are activated. The very process of re-establishing attuned relational connection while still feeling the negative emotion is what activates the neurons that link across from the negative emotion circuits to the relational connection circuits, and each time these neurons are activated, the pathway connecting the two groups of circuits is reinforced. As the infant practices this exercise for each of the right-sided negative emotions, the bridging pathways grow stronger and stronger, until eventually there are strong and stable neurological pathways linking the neurological circuits for each of the negative right-sided emotions to the neurological circuits mediating relational connection. The development of these neurological pathways enables the infant's brain to activate the circuits for each of the right-sided negative emotions *without losing access to the relational connection circuits*, and these *brain training neurological changes* correspond to learning the psychological/spiritual *maturity skills* of being able to *maintain* attuned relational connection and relational connection joy *while experiencing each of the right-sided negative emotions*.

During practice, the infant is repeatedly *losing* access to the relational connection circuits because of getting isolated in the negative emotion circuits, and then *re-establishing* access to the relational connection circuits while remaining connected to the negative emotion circuits. The corresponding mind/spirit experience is repeatedly *losing* attuned relational connection and relational connection joy while feeling immersed in negative emotions, and then *re-establishing* attuned relational connection and relational connection joy while still feeling the negative emotions. However, after the maturity skills have been learned, and strong, stable neurological connections have been developed, the infant is able to *maintain* access to the relational connection circuits as she encounters painful experiences that cause negative emotion circuits to be activated. As long as the negative emotions do not exceed her skill and/or capacity, she will be able to move through painful experiences and feel negative emotions *while maintaining access to the relational connection circuits, and therefore also maintaining attuned relational connection, relational connection joy, and the relational aspect of her self*.

⁴¹ Again, regaining access to her relational connection circuits will *always, necessarily* also include re-establishing attuned relational connection, returning to relational connection joy, and recovering the relational aspect of herself *because these are all different aspects of the exact same process*.

Once this brain training and maturity skill learning has been downloaded from the parent to the infant, the infant will be able to maintain attuned relational connection and relational connection joy by herself. You will always appreciate another person attuned to you and glad to be with you – this will always be a source of encouragement and joy that will augment your capacity – but once you have learned the maturity skills of being able to maintain relational connection joy while experiencing each of the right-sided negative emotions, you will no longer need somebody else to initiate attunement and lead in the process of re-establishing relational connection joy each time you experience one of the right-sided negative emotions. Another way to say this is that you need an *external other* to *train* your brain and *teach* you these skills, but once this has been accomplished, you can maintain relational connection joy in the presence of distressing emotions, *even when you are alone – based on **internalized, remembered** attuned relational connection, and based on **internalized, remembered** brain training and maturity skills.*

When brain/mind/spirit development unfolds as it is supposed to, this brain training and skill learning occurs in the context of interactions between the infant and her primary caregivers, and it is complete by 18 months of age.

Unfortunately, what has just been described is the ideal scenario. In real life, some of us fail to master these maturity skills of being able to maintain attuned relational connection and relational connection joy in the presence of each of the distressing right-sided emotions. The most common reason for this is that our parents are not perfect. Each of our parents have a unique profile with respect to “maintain joy” maturity skills, with most parents having a mixture of right-sided negative emotions that they handle well and right-sided negative emotions that they handle with difficulty. Some parents also have right-sided negative emotions that they are not able to handle at all. *And if your parents have blind spots or weaknesses in their “maintain joy” maturity skills profile, they will pass these blind spots and weaknesses on to you.* That is, as you learn from your parents, the material you learn will include their blind spots and weaknesses – as you learn and download their skills, you will also “learn” and download their blind spots and weaknesses.

As will be discussed in much more detail below, being unable to maintain joy in the presence of intense right-sided negative emotions can be what causes *painful* experiences to become *traumatic* experiences that are then stored as *traumatic memories*. And when we try to resolve these traumatic memories, the first thing we need to help us get unstuck – the first thing we need for something new to happen – the first thing we need to be able to resolve the situation that we had not been able to handle on our own, is for someone with a better trained brain and stronger maturity skills to help us re-establish attuned relational connection and the corresponding relational connection joy.

Simultaneous joy and distress: The above discussion of re-establishing and/or maintaining relational connection joy brings up an interesting and important point: being able to feel relational connection joy and distressing emotions *at the same time* means that you can experience relational connection joy *even as you suffer*. To experience the positive, pleasant subjective state of feeling *joyful*, you need to be at least mostly free of emotional and/or physical pain; but you can experience the “I’m glad to be with you” joy of attuned relational connection *even as you suffer*. Again, even when you are in a painful situation, if someone is attuned to you and glad to be with you, you can experience relational connection joy *even as you are still, simultaneously, experiencing physical pain and/or negative emotions*. For example, with each of our miscarriages Charlotte and I have grieved *together*. We have been very emotionally

connected and attuned to each other, we have been glad to be together, *and* we have grieved. As we were attuned to each other, glad to be together, *and* grieving, we experienced relational connection joy *even as we were both grieving*.

When I first encountered this part of the theory, it didn't seem to fit my experience because I didn't *recognize* the joy that was present in distressing situations. My spontaneous, intuitive response was: "I just don't see it." Part of resolving this difficulty has been coming to understand that there are two very different conditions in which we can experience joy: we can experience joy *without simultaneous distress*, in which case it is easy to see, and we can experience joy *in combination with simultaneous distress*, in which case it is much harder to see. A helpful analogy is to think about listening to two different instruments, such as a trumpet and a violin. If you hear a song being played by a violin alone, it is very easy to recognize the violin. However, if you hear a trumpet and violin playing the exact same melody together, it can be very difficult to recognize the violin (especially if the trumpet is playing loudly⁴²).

Another part of resolving my "I just don't see it" difficulty has been finding creative approaches for detecting the presence of joy. Returning to our analogy of two instruments playing the exact same melody: If the trumpet is playing loudly, it will be difficult to hear or recognize the violin; and if you are musically inexperienced, it will even be difficult to tell whether the music is being produced by a single instrument, or whether several instruments are playing together. In this case, it will be easier to hear the violin if you start with the trumpet playing alone, and then add the violin. When you hear the violin join the trumpet, you can easily recognize that something is different. Even if you still have difficulty identifying that the second instrument is a violin, you will certainly realize that another instrument is also playing. The experience of feeling joy together with painful emotions is very similar. It can be difficult to recognize the subjective feeling of joy when you are experiencing intense negative emotions at the same time; however, it is much easier to recognize that something feels *different* when joy is added to painful emotions – it is much easier to notice the *difference* between how it feels when you are in a distressing situation *without* joy, and how it feels when you are in the same distressing situation *with* joy.

If you are in a distressing situation *without* joy, then, by definition, you are experiencing painful emotions *without* attuned relational connection to another person, *without* access to the relational aspect of yourself, *without* access to internalized, memory-based attuned relational connection or relational connection joy, and *without* perception of the Lord's attuned relational presence. This is an especially, uniquely miserable experience. And your subjective experience of this situation will change dramatically if someone comes and joins you, attunes to you, and is glad to be with you – your subjective experience of this situation will change dramatically, *even though you are still in the same painful situation and still feeling the same negative emotions*. You can perceive, subjectively, the recovery of the relational aspect of your being, and this feels better than being non-relational. You can perceive attuned relational connection, and this feels better than being alone. You can perceive that your companion is glad to be with you, and this feels good. Even though you are still in the same distressing situation, feeling the same negative emotions, it will definitely feel better to have recovered the relational aspect of your self, to have re-established attuned relational connection, and to have re-established relational connection joy. Even though you might still have difficulty recognizing "this is joy," you will certainly be able to tell that

⁴² As would be the case if the analogy is representing the experience of feeling joy in combination with intense negative emotions.

something is different – that your overall experience has changed for the better.

Another way to summarize these last two points would be: “Joy alone feels different than joy + pain,” and “Pain alone feels different than pain + joy.”

Re-establishing joy, maintaining joy, and brain levels: Level 3 cingulate cortex is the part of the brain Mom’s mind will use to reach out to her infant, initiate attunement, re-establish mutual mind connection, and communicate “I’m glad to be with you.” Level 3 cingulate cortex is the part of the brain that Mom will use to teach her infant the psychological/spiritual maturity skills of re-establishing attuned relational connection and relational connection joy while feeling each of the distressing emotions. Level 3 cingulate cortex is the part of the brain the infant’s mind will use to respond to Mom’s attunement initiative, and to re-establish mutual mind connection and share her negative emotions with Mom; and then level 1 receives the “I’m glad to be with you” message and re-establishes relational connection joy.

Level 3 cingulate cortex is the part of the brain the infant will use to learn the psychological/spiritual maturity skills of maintaining attuned relational connection and relational connection joy while feeling each of the distressing emotions, and Level 3 cingulate cortex is the part of the brain we use to maintain attuned relational connection and relational connection joy through the brief encounters with negative emotions that we experience each day. When we work through more intense painful experiences and/or resolve traumatic memories, level 3 cingulate cortex is the part of the brain we use to regain access to our relational connection circuits, to re-establish attuned relational connection, and to recover the relational aspects of our selves, and then level 1 re-establishes relational connection joy.

Theory regarding joy, “returning to joy,” and maintaining joy is difficult to validate: I don’t want to just present interesting ideas for your amusement, I want you to *believe* what I am teaching you. Furthermore, I want you to *believe it so strongly that you actually begin to apply it in your lives*. For this to occur, you will need to convince yourselves that the theories I am presenting are consistent with your experience of the real world. As you set out to see whether or not these theories are consistent with your own observations, it is important to realize that this theory with respect to relational connection joy, “returning to joy,” and maintaining joy is especially difficult to validate in our personal life experiences.

One reason for this is that the attuned relational connection/“I’m glad to be with you” joy foundation described here is established in infancy, *before the circuits for permanent autobiographical memory have come on line*. This means that we don’t have conscious autobiographical memory for the process of building this foundation, and that we don’t have conscious autobiographical memory for the specific attuned relational connections and “I’m glad to be with you” experiences that contribute to this foundation. We also usually complete the “maintain relational connection joy” brain training and maturity skill learning in infancy, before the circuits for permanent autobiographical memory have come on line. This means that we have no conscious autobiographical memory of what it was like before we had these skills, and that we have no conscious autobiographical memory for the process of learning these skills.

Another factor contributing to this difficulty is that the level 3 process of maintaining (or re-establishing) access to our relational connection circuits is an intuitive, *non-conscious*, right-sided phenomena. This means that *we cannot perceive or feel it happening*, and are therefore *not*

consciously aware of this phenomena as it occurs in our present experience.

A third factor contributing to this difficult is that we cannot feel our foundation of internalized attuned relational connection and relational connection joy when we are triggered to traumatic memories that include being unable to maintain joy or return to joy. Many of us are subtly triggered to this kind of implicit memory content much more often that we realize, and whenever we are triggered in this way much of this theory will appear to be inconsistent with our personal experience.

A fourth factor is that some people have never yet received a good foundation of attuned relational connection and “I’m glad to be with you” joy, and so large parts of this theory will not feel consistent with their life experiences.

A fifth factor is that Many of us have more holes in our brain training and maturity skills that we realize. When this results in parts of the theory *appearing* to be inconsistent with our experience, we can either conclude that the model is faulty or consider the humbling possibility that we have overestimated the strength and completeness of our maturity skills. The first option is certainly much less narcissistically mortifying.

In summary: We don’t remember the process of laying down our relational connection joy foundations, the internalized attuned relational connections and “I’m glad to be with you” joy experiences that form the joy foundations for our lives are stored as *implicit memory* that we are *not consciously aware of*, we are not consciously aware of the right-sided processes that access this implicit memory material as the source of our baseline joy each day, most of us can’t remember what it was like before obtaining our “maintain joy” skills, we can’t remember the process of learning these skills, we are not able to consciously perceive the process of using these skills in the present, many of us are often triggered in ways that will cause our experience to appear inconsistent with this theory, and some have not yet received a foundation of relational connection joy, which will cause much of their experience to appear inconsistent with this theory. These factors present special challenges when it comes to testing/validating this theory in our personal life experiences.

So how did we come up with these theories anyway? The very short summary is: Many psychologists, psychiatrists, and developmental neurobiologists made many, many observations in a large number of case studies and experiments, and then some theorists, such as Dr. Schore, Dr. Siegel, Dr. Wilder, and myself put all of these pieces together to get the theory I have just summarized in a very simplified form. In light of the factors just discussed, accepting this theory requires a lot of faith in these clinicians, scientists, and theorists. In my perception, one of the strongest reasons to accept this theory regarding relational connection joy, “returning to joy,” and maintaining joy is the strength of the larger theoretical framework that it contributes to (discussed in the remainder of this document). As I have carefully tested it over the last several years, the larger theoretical framework discussed here is consistent with the data from my personal experience, it is consistent with the data from my clinical experience, and it is consistent with the data from case studies and research in the professional literature. It has explained observations that no other theory has explained, and it has provided practical guidance that has resulted in successful resolution for situations that had previously remained stuck.

Even though it is quite complex, and not intuitively obvious from everyday experience due to the

factors just discussed, I would encourage you consider this theory, and to watch for situations where you can test it. In some ways, this theory about relational connection joy, returning to joy, and maintaining joy is much like our beliefs regarding germs and nuclear physics – we can't test germ theory or nuclear physics by direct observations in our every day lives, but we have come to believe these theories based on many observations of indirect evidence.⁴³ In my own experience, one of the best ways to test these theories is to watch for emotions where you are able to stay relational and maintain relational connection joy, watch for emotions where you are not able to stay relational and maintain relational connection joy, and then compare these different experiences. For example, I do a very good job of staying relational and maintaining relational connection joy with disgust and sadness, I do a mediocre job of staying relational and maintaining relational connection joy with shame and hopeless despair (after lots of healing work with these two emotions), and I still have a lot of difficulty staying relational and maintaining relational connection joy with fear and anger. I find some of the best evidence validating these theories when I carefully observe and think about the differences between my experiences with disgust and sadness, my experiences with shame and hopeless despair, and my experiences with fear and anger.

II. Introduction: We all encounter painful experiences. When we encounter pain, our brain/mind/spirit system tries to process the painful experience using the five levels of neurological circuitry described above. Our attempt to process the experience starts with unconscious, involuntary, sub-cortical processing at levels 1 and 2, moves upwards to cortical processing at level 3, and then finally to conscious, voluntary, cortical processing at levels 4 and 5. If we have adequate capacity, adequate maturity skills, and adequate community, we are able to complete the processing journey: we are able to maintain organized attachment (level 1); we are able to hold the experience in our conscious awareness and stay emotionally connected (level 2); we are able to choose to stay with the processing attempt (levels 3, 4, & 5); we are able to maintain (or re-establish) attuned relational connection and relational connection joy *even in situations where the negative emotions continue* (level 3); we are able to navigate the situation in a way that is satisfying (level 4); we are able to make sense out of the experience, and we are able to correctly interpret the meaning of the experience with respect to ourselves (level 5).

When we *are* able to successfully complete this processing journey, the experience may be painful *but we get through it without being traumatized*. We emotionally and cognitively “metabolize” the experience in a healthy way, and memory for the experience is stored as non-traumatic memory files that contribute to knowledge, skills, empathy, wisdom, maturity, and conscious autobiographical memory for our personal history. These non-traumatic memories do *not* carry any toxic content or have any toxic power. When these memories are activated at any point in the future they contribute valuable resources as opposed to interfering with our ability to function.

However, various problems at each of the levels can block successful completion of the processing journey. If we are *not* able to complete the processing journey, then the painful experience becomes a traumatic experience, and the memory files for this experience will carry

⁴³ Most of us are so familiar with germ theory that we don't realize how difficult it is to validate on the basis of every day experience. I came to appreciate this only when I read accounts from missionaries, describing the incredible difficulties they encountered when working with primitive tribal groups, and trying to convince them that diseases were caused by invisible animals that lived everywhere, including inside their bodies. Yeah, right! Tell me another one.

unresolved traumatic content. When this kind of memory is activated at any point in the future, *the toxic, unresolved content comes forward and feels true in the present*. Toxic content from unresolved traumatic events might include unprocessed physical sensations, disorganized attachment, unresolved negative right-sided emotions, feelings of inadequacy, confusion, distorted interpretations (lies) regarding the meaning of the traumatic experience, and dysfunctional left-sided emotions based on the trauma-associated distorted interpretations. This toxic, unresolved memory content will disrupt our ability to function as it comes forward and blends with our experience in the present.

III. The processing pathway and problems that can hinder it:

A. level 1 – maintaining organized attachment: Attachment related activity at level 1 dramatically affects attempts to process at higher levels. Secure attachment is the best foundation for processing at levels 3, 4, and 5; distracted attachment and dismissive attachment are somewhat disruptive, and disorganized attachment is totally disruptive. Note that the level 2 disconnection function is parallel to/independent of disorganization at level 1, since a person can be in disorganized attachment but still connected, or the experience can be so overwhelming that the person becomes disorganized and then also disconnects.

Secure attachment: Secure attachment is the best foundation for all other activities, including all higher levels of processing for painful experiences. One aspect of secure attachment is that the vegetative branch of the parasympathetic nervous system is correctly set, and also stable at this correct setting. The person's emotional intensity will therefore be consistently appropriate. The ideal scenario is to start by standing on the accurate and stable neurological foundation of secure attachment, and then sally forth from this optimal foundation to process painful experiences at each of the higher levels.

Distracted attachment: With distracted attachment, the vegetative branch of the parasympathetic nervous system is turned down, and since this in an inhibitory system, turning it down means that emotional intensity will actually be turned up. The result is that the baseline emotional intensity will be more intense than is appropriate for the actual situation. In addition to turning up the baseline emotional volume, distracted attachment also produces disruptive variability. Both the increased intensity and the disruptive variability then run through the whole system. What this means is that, compared to people with secure attachment, those with distracted attachment will have brains that are more easily upset and more intensely upset, and that their emotional reactions will be less predictable and harder to control. This makes everything more difficult, but you can still get some success with higher levels of processing (more work, poorer results, but not total disruption).

Dismissive attachment: With dismissive attachment, the vegetative branch of the parasympathetic nervous system is turned up, and since this in an inhibitory system, turning it up means that the emotional intensity will actually be turned down. The result is that the baseline emotional intensity will be less intense than is appropriate for the actual situation. This erroneously decreased emotional intensity then runs through the whole system. What this means is that, compared to people with secure attachment, the brains of people with dismissive attachment will miss the importance of events that can impact their relationships. These people will tend to shrug off and forget about relational things

that others find important. They may seem unaffected when others are upset, and may feel little motivation to change, even when those they love really want them to take something seriously. This makes everything more difficult, but you can still get some success with higher levels of processing (more work, poorer results, but not total disruption).

Disorganized attachment: Disorganized attachment is the worst foundation for all other activities. With disorganized attachment, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems both act in unpredictable and unusual ways that are totally disruptive. If a person is in an acute state of attachment disorganization, it will be impossible for him to successfully complete processing at levels 3, 4, or 5. As mentioned above, a person must at least have organized attachment to even attempt processing an experience at levels 3, 4, and 5.

Immanuel thoughts regarding attachment: Jesus is the perfect source of secure attachment. Relationally, He always sees us (as opposed to being distracted), He always understands us, He always attunes to us, He is always glad to be with us, He is always safe (He never gets triggered, offended, judgmental, or vindictive), and He always responds appropriately to the unique situations we bring to Him – together, these are the perfect ingredients for secure attachment. Furthermore, He is *always* with us, even when others in our community are not available.⁴⁴

If we do not yet have secure attachment with Jesus, then to the extent we are able to perceive Him, connect with Him, and synchronize with Him, His Immanuel presence will provide the best possible conditions for building secure attachment.

If we already have a secure attachment with Jesus, then to the extent we are able to perceive His presence, connect with Him, and synchronize with Him, we will have the best possible secure attachment context in which to process painful experiences (both painful experiences in the present and memories of unresolved painful experiences from the past).

Perceiving and connecting with the Lord's Immanuel presence is especially valuable when dealing with traumatic memories where disorganized attachment is blocking the healing process.⁴⁵ As described above, in a state of acute disorganized attachment, the equation is: one of the child's primary attachment figures = the source of distress. In any memory where the person has acute disorganized attachment, this equation changes when she perceives Jesus' presence *in the memory*, connects with Him, and transfers her primary attachment onto Him.⁴⁶ Jesus becomes the primary attachment figure, and the person who is the source of pain and danger in the memory, *and who was previously also the primary attachment figure*, becomes *just* the source of distress. The primary attachment figure (now Jesus) is no longer also the source of distress, the equation for disorganized attachment is therefore dismantled, and the state of acute disorganized attachment in the memory will resolve. Standing on the

⁴⁴ This is especially important for those who have meager community.

⁴⁵ For those of you who are not already familiar with this scenario, working in a memory with acute disorganized attachment can be one of the most difficult clinical challenges.

⁴⁶ As discussed at more length below, Jesus is the one person who can actually step into the place of one our primary attachment figures.

foundation of secure attachment with Jesus, with disorganized attachment no longer disrupting the process, you can then move ahead with the rest of the pain processing journey.

Furthermore, some of the most recent, cutting edge research on attachment styles *indicates that we can grow secure attachment as our baseline attachment style, even if we did not get it in childhood.*⁴⁷ What this means is that, over time, as you build a secure attachment foundation with Jesus, *your baseline attachment style can actually change from any of the forms of insecure attachment to secure attachment.* And I know this is true because I have seen it happen!

B. level 2 – loading the experience into your normal conscious awareness and staying emotionally connected: Activity at level 2 also dramatically affects attempts to process at higher levels.

Adequate involuntary capacity: The key regarding level 2 is that you need to be able to load the experience into your normal conscious awareness and remain emotionally connected so that you can complete processing at levels 3, 4, & 5. You will be able to do this if you have adequate involuntary capacity – your level 2 circuits will conclude that you are able to handle the intensity, the content will be allowed into the usual processing pathway so that it will enter your normal conscious awareness, and you will stay emotionally connected.

Inadequate involuntary capacity → painful experience becomes traumatic experience, traumatic memory: If the painful experience exceeds your involuntary capacity, level 2 will employ its “damage control” functions. The good news is that this prevents neurological “house fires.” The bad news is that this also prevents successful processing at levels 3, 4, and 5. If the painful experience moderately exceeds your involuntary capacity, level 2 mechanisms will cause emotional disconnection, but you will still be able to load the experience into normal conscious awareness. If the painful experience dramatically exceeds involuntary capacity, level 2 mechanisms route the content to alternative neurological circuits, and you will *not* be able to load the experience into your normal conscious awareness.

If you are emotionally disconnected, you will not be able to successfully complete processing at any of the higher levels, and the traumatic experience will be stored in this very unprocessed state. If the content is routed to the alternative pathway so that you are not even able to load the experience into your normal conscious awareness, you will not even be able to *attempt* processing at higher levels, but rather will store the memory as a dissociated flashback memory package.

Level 2 and traumatic memories: Whenever the memory gets activated in the future, you will immediately face the problem of whether you have adequate involuntary capacity:

If maturity, healing, and other positive factors have increased your involuntary capacity to

⁴⁷ See, for example Roisman, Glenn I.; Padron, Elena; Sroufe, L.Alan; Egeland, Byron, “Earned secure attachment status in retrospect and prospect.” *Child Development*, July/August 2002, Vol. 73, No. 4, pages 1204-1219. See also the discussion of “earned secure attachment” in Siegel, D.J., and Hartzell, M. *Parenting From the Inside*. (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/ Putnam, a member of Penguin Putnam Inc.) 2003, pages 142-147.

the point that it is now adequate, your level 2 circuits will conclude that you are able to handle the intensity of the traumatic content, the memory will be allowed into the usual processing pathway so that it will enter your normal conscious awareness, and you will stay emotionally connected. Since the experience was initially stored as a dissociated flashback memory package, it will come forward as a flashback, *but this time the flashback content will be loaded into your normal conscious awareness, so that you will not have a blackout for the flashback experience, and regardless of whether or not the content is successfully processed at higher levels, it will then be stored as a non-dissociated memory.*

If your involuntary capacity is still moderately inadequate, the memory will be allowed into your normal conscious awareness; but you will once again disconnect emotionally and therefore be unable to successfully complete processing at any of the higher levels, and the unresolved traumatic content will once again be stored in this very unprocessed state.

If triggering stimuli are sufficiently intense to overcome dissociative barriers *but you still have profoundly inadequate involuntary capacity*, the memory will come forward and level 2 mechanisms will once again shunt the traumatic content to the alternative neurological circuits. Since the original experience was stored as a dissociated flashback memory package, it will come forward as a flashback. And just as with the original experience, since the memory content is shunted to the alternative pathway *it will not load into your normal conscious awareness, you will have a blackout for the flashback experience, and you will once again store the unresolved traumatic content as a dissociated flashback memory package.*

Community and mutual mind: If there are people in your community who have enough maturity and capacity to be *glad to be with you* in your painful experience, to *synchronize* with your emotional pain, and to *stay* with you in your pain, then sharing a “mutual mind” connection with one of these people can augment your involuntary capacity. If this person is glad to be with you in your painful experience, synchronizes with your emotional pain, and stays with you in your pain, your brain/mind capacity will actually be increased as long as you maintain this synchronized mutual mind connection. Even if you do *not* have adequate involuntary capacity on your own, good community can sometimes provide enough augmentation to enable you to load the painful content into your normal conscious awareness and to remain emotionally connected.

Immanuel thoughts regarding involuntary capacity: Jesus is the ideal source of mutual mind capacity augmentation. He is always present, even when others in our community are not available.⁴⁸ Since He loves us with perfect love, He is always glad to be with us, even in our painful experiences. He has beyond-elder maturity skills, so He is always able to synchronize with us in our emotional pain. And He has infinite capacity, so He is always able to *stay* with us, no matter how intense our pain might be or how long it might last. To the extent we are able to perceive the Lord’s presence and synchronize with Him, we will have the best possible mutual mind connection for augmenting our involuntary capacity. For example, we have worked with a number of people who initially did not have enough involuntary capacity

⁴⁸ As already noted, this is especially important for those who have meager community.

to bring certain memories into their normal conscious awareness. However, when we helped them to **first establish a good connection with Jesus**, they were able to load the previously unbearable painful content into normal conscious awareness as they went to the memories *with Him*, and they were able to stay emotionally connected as they worked *with Him* to process the previously unbearable content.

C. Level 3 – staying with negative emotions, and maintaining/re-establishing relational connection joy: As you move through a painful experience, the most important level 3 processing task is to maintain/re-establish access to your relational connection circuits, maintain/re-establish the relational aspect of your self, maintain/re-establish attuned relational connection, and maintain/re-establish relational connection joy *while feeling the negative emotions associated with the experience.*⁴⁹

Successful processing at level 3: In the best case scenario, your level 3 processing is able to maintain these neurological, psychological, and spiritual resources the first time through. When you successfully complete this level 3 processing task for each wave of new information coming forward from levels 1 and 2, the information then passing forward from level 3 to level 4 will include the negative emotions associated with the experience *together with* access to your relational connection circuits, attuned relational connection, relational connection joy, and the presence of the relational aspect of your self. *And these neurological/psychological/spiritual resources are a necessary foundation for successful processing at levels 4 and 5.*

If you are *not* able to maintain access to your relational connection circuits, the relational aspect of your self, attuned relational connection, and relational connection joy, then the level 3 processing task is to first *re-establish* these neurological/psychological/spiritual resources by establishing attuned relational connection with an external other in your community.⁵⁰ With the help of attuned relational connection with this external other, you can then go back through the painful experience while *maintaining* access to your relational connection circuits, the relational aspect of yourself, etc.

Adequate voluntary capacity: Being able to handle the negative emotions in a painful experience requires adequate voluntary capacity, so that you *choose* to stay with the painful emotions *long enough* to complete level 3 processing. At level 2, if you do not have adequate involuntary capacity, sub-cortical, unconscious, involuntary mechanisms cause you to disconnect from the painful experience. However, when the information from a painful experience or traumatic memory gets passed forward to Level 3, you become consciously aware of the painful mental content, and therefore also have conscious choices regarding whether to stay with it. If you have adequate *voluntary capacity* (you are able to handle the intensity of the negative emotions and choose to stay with the painful experience), you can then attempt the level 3 processing tasks of maintaining and/or re-establishing access to your

⁴⁹ Again, maintaining/re-establishing access to your relational connection circuits, maintaining/re-establishing the relational aspect of your self, maintaining/re-establishing attuned relational connection, and maintaining/re-establishing relational connection joy *always, inherently* go together because they are all aspects of the exact same process.

⁵⁰ This external other in your community must, of course, have adequate capacity and maturity skills to be able to attune to you and stay with you through the process of resolving the painful experience.

relational connection circuits, the relational aspect of yourself,...etc.

In ideal situations, where you *maintain* access to your relational connection circuits, this successful level 3 processing is happening for each wave of new information as you go through the experience, and level 3 processing for the whole experience is finished within moments of getting through it. In these situations, choosing to stay with the painful emotions long enough to complete level 3 processing just means choosing to stay with the experience (for example, not running out of the room in the middle of a painful conflict). However, if you lose access to your relational connection circuits, and therefore need attuned relational connection with someone in your community in order to re-establish these necessary resources, then successful completion of level 3 processing will require significant additional time. For example, after a painful argument is over, you might need to find someone in your community who can attune to you and help you finish level 3 processing, and this will require choosing to stay with the painful emotions long after the actual argument has ended. If you do *not* have adequate voluntary capacity, you will choose to escape the pain, and this will end the processing attempt. For example, you can end a painful conflict by running out of the room. Or, if you stayed in the experience but were not able to successfully complete level 3 processing as you went through it, instead of staying with the pain after the experience is over and going to find someone to help you continue processing, you can choose to shut the pain down and end the processing attempt.

Adequate level 3 maturity skills: Being able to handle the negative emotions in a painful experience also requires adequate level 3 maturity skills, so that you are *able* to successfully complete level 3 processing. If you have adequate voluntary capacity, so that you are able to handle the intensity of the negative emotions and choose to stay with the painful experience, you can then attempt level 3 processing tasks; and if you also have adequate level 3 *skills*, your level 3 processing attempt will be successful. If you do *not* have adequate maturity skills to successfully complete level 3 processing, you will eventually realize you are stuck, and will then choose to end the processing attempt.

Community augmentation for level 3 processing: At this point it is important to understand that community can augment both your *voluntary capacity* and *maturity skills* for level 3 processing. As described above, level 3 maturity skills are originally learned in the context of mutual mind. When you experience a painful emotion, your care-giver joins you in the experience. You can see on her face that she is sharing the same emotion, and as you join with her in a state of mutual mind, and also perceive that she is glad to be with you, you regain access to your relational connection circuits, recover the relational aspect of your self, re-establish attuned relational connection, and re-establish relational connection joy. As also described above, you develop capacity for choosing to stay with painful emotions and level 3 maturity skills for re-establishing and maintaining relational connection joy as you repeatedly practice this with your care-giver.

For painful experiences later in life, if the intensity and duration of negative emotions exceeds your voluntary capacity and level 3 skills, *you can still complete level 3 processing if you get additional mutual mind help – you can still complete level 3 processing if you synchronize with another person who is joining you in your negative right-sided emotions,*

who is glad to be with you,⁵¹ and who has the capacity to stay with you. Synchronizing with someone who is glad to be with you in your painful emotions, and who has the capacity to stay with you in your pain, will augment your *voluntary capacity*; and synchronizing with someone who is glad to be with you, who has the capacity to stay with you, and who has the maturity skills to initiate and offer attunement will augment your level 3 *skills*.

For example, if you are able to maintain access to your relational connection circuits while dealing with minor disappointments and losses, but then your mother dies when you are six years old, the sadness associated with this loss will be present at a much greater level of intensity and duration that will exceed your voluntary capacity and maturity skills. However, you can still complete level 3 processing if people in your community help you with this sadness. You can still complete level 3 processing if you synchronize with others in your community who can augment your voluntary capacity, so that you can stay with the intense sadness; and if you establish mutual mind connection with others who can augment your level 3 maturity skills, so that you can regain and then maintain access to your relational connection circuits.

Again, even if you do not have adequate voluntary capacity and/or level 3 skills, adequate community can augment your capacity and skills, and thereby enable you to complete level 3 processing.

Failed level 3 processing → painful experience becomes traumatic experience, traumatic memory: Unfortunately, we are often in situations where we do *not* have adequate voluntary capacity and/or adequate maturity skills, *and where we are also without adequate augmentation from our community*. This takes us back to choosing to end the processing attempt. Whether you are choosing to end the processing attempt because you can't stand the pain or because you realize you are stuck, the most basic way to implement this choice is simply to move your conscious focus of attention to something else – “just don't think about it.” If the neurological tools for simply *choosing* to change your focus of attention are not adequate, you can use whatever other tools you have discovered to help you turn away from unresolved pain.⁵²

Unfortunately, moving your conscious attention onto something else will *temporarily* stop the pain, but the unprocessed painful experience will then be stored as a traumatic memory. When you store a painful experience before completing level 3 processing tasks, the results of this failed level 3 processing – inability to access your relational connection circuits, with corresponding absence of the relational aspect of your self, absence of attuned relational connection, and lack of relational connection joy – will all be included in the traumatic memory for the unresolved painful experience, and this unfinished business will then come forward each time the memory is activated.

⁵¹ For those of you who are wondering: yes, “synchronizing with someone who is joining you in your negative right-sided emotions and who is glad to be with you” is the same thing as establishing attunement mutual mind connection.

⁵² For example, prayer, relaxation techniques, immersing yourself in important tasks, binge eating, alcohol, pornography and masturbation, cocaine, etc. These techniques for temporary pain management obviously vary greatly in their healthiness vs destructiveness.

One of the most important points regarding memories containing loss of relational connection circuits is that, *once we have become adults*, these memories getting triggered forward will be *the single most important cause of losing access to our relational connection circuits*. As described in the earlier example with Charlotte and I and the desynchronized PowerPoint slides, a relatively minor painful situation can cause us to lose the relational aspect of our selves when the pain of mild to moderate intensity is not *directly* causing us to lose access to our relational connection circuits, but rather *indirectly* causes this problem by triggering traumatic memories whose unresolved content includes loss of relational connection.

Level 3 processing for *traumatic memories*: Level 3 processing for traumatic *memories* is very similar to level 3 processing for original *painful experiences*. At each point in the future that a traumatic memory gets activated, you will have another opportunity to take care of any unfinished level 3 business.

If your voluntary capacity is still inadequate, you will once again choose to shut the pain down and stuff the unresolved material back into its memory file before you have time to complete this processing.

If you have adequate *capacity* but your *skills* are still inadequate, even if you initially stay with the memory in another attempt to finish level 3 processing, you will eventually realize that you are stuck. You will then shut the pain down and stuff the unresolved material back into its memory file.

If your capacity and/or level 3 skills are still inadequate *but you have community that can provide augmentation*, then your first level 3 processing task will be to *re-establish* access to your relational connection circuits by establishing attuned relational connection with an external other in your community. With the help of attuned relational connection with this external other, you can then go through the memory while *maintaining* access to your relational connection circuits.

If you have developed strong voluntary capacity and level 3 maturity skills since the time of the original experience, you will be able to take care of unfinished level 3 business without needing help from someone in your community. As the memory comes forward through your social/emotional processing system, you will chose to stay with the pain, and successful level 3 processing will maintain access to your relational connection circuits, the relational aspect of yourself, attuned relational connection, and relational connection joy.

*If you do successfully complete level 3 processing for the memory, then **this aspect** of the traumatic memory will be permanently resolved.*

Summary of conditions for level 3 processing failure: You will be unable to successfully complete level 3 processing of the painful experience (at the time it occurs, or at any time the memory of the unresolved experience gets activated) if:

Level 1 has been unable to maintain organized attachment: As discussed above, disorganized attachment at level 1 will completely disrupt any attempts to process at levels 3, 4, or 5. You must be able to maintain one of the forms of organized attachment

at level 1 in order to successfully complete processing at levels 3, 4, or 5.

You don't have adequate involuntary capacity, and therefore level 2 implements dissociative disconnection: As mentioned above, if the person has inadequate involuntary capacity, unconscious, involuntary level 2 processes can cause emotional disconnection or route the content to an alternative pathway. This can happen either at the time of the original experience, or whenever the memory for an unresolved painful experience gets activated. Again, you cannot complete level 3 processing if you cannot remain emotionally connected or retain the experience in your normal conscious awareness.

You don't have adequate voluntary capacity, and therefore choose to shut things down before level 3 processing is complete: If you have inadequate voluntary capacity, you will choose to not stay with the negative emotion(s) long enough – you will choose to shut things down before completing level 3 processing. Even if you have enough level 3 skill that you could maintain/re-establish access to your relational connection circuits, maintain/re-establish the relational aspect of yourself,...etc, if you cannot handle the *intensity* of the negative emotions in a particular painful situation, you will choose to shut things down before you have time to complete these processing tasks. For example, the memory of a traumatic experience gets activated, but you still do not have adequate voluntary capacity and so still are not able to handle the intensity of the pain present in the memory for this particular traumatic event. You therefore immediately choose to shift the focus of your conscious attention away from the painful memory, before you even have a chance to try processing the negative emotions.

As mentioned above, if the neurological mechanisms for simply choosing to shift the focus of your attention are not adequate, you can employ whatever other tools you have learned to shut the memory down and move on with life. The memory gets shut down, so that the triggered thoughts and emotions are no longer active in the present, but it remains unprocessed. It goes back into its original traumatic memory file, as opposed to being resolved (in which case the modified file would be stored as a non-traumatic memory).

You don't have adequate level 3 skills, and so get stuck in the negative emotion without being able to maintain/re-establish access to your relational connection circuits: If you have inadequate level 3 skills, you will remain stuck in the negative emotion(s) without being able to maintain/re-establish access to your relational connection circuits, maintain/re-establish the relational aspect of your self,...etc.. Even if you have adequate voluntary capacity and *could* stay with the painful emotions longer, if you are stuck you will eventually realize “this isn't going anywhere,” and will then decide to shut the pain down and stuff the unresolved material back into its memory file. For example, the memory of a painful experience gets activated, but you still do not have adequate level 3 skills, and so are not able to maintain/re-establish access to your relational connection circuits,...etc. You sit and stew in the triggered thoughts and emotions for an hour, and then decide that the memory doesn't seem to be resolving. At this point, you choose to shift the focus of your conscious attention away from the painful memory.

As mentioned above, if the neurological mechanisms for simply choosing to shift the

focus of your attention are not adequate, you can employ whatever other tools you have learned to shut the memory down and move on with life. The memory gets shut down, so that the triggered thoughts and emotions are no longer active in the present, but it remains unprocessed; and it goes back into its original traumatic memory file, as opposed to being resolved (in which case the modified file would be stored as a non-traumatic memory).

You don't have adequate community: As described above, even if you do not have adequate voluntary capacity and/or level 3 skills, attuned mutual mind connection with others in your community can augment both your capacity and your level 3 skills, and thereby enable you to complete level 3 processing. You will *not* be able to complete level 3 processing if your voluntary capacity and level 3 skills are inadequate *and you are also without adequate augmentation from your community.*

You don't have time/emotional space to get through the processing: As mentioned above, you will need additional time for processing if you lose access to your relational connection circuits, the relational aspect of yourself,...etc, and therefore need attuned relational connection with someone in your community in order to re-establish these necessary biological, psychological, and spiritual resources. In some situations, there is simply not time or emotional space to do this.

For example, when I was in medical school, on the emergency room surgical service, a child was brought in who had run onto the highway and been hit by a car going 60 miles per hour. In addition to a number of other injuries, his neck was broken in four places and his left leg was bent sideways at a 45 degree angle in the middle of his thigh. His heart stopped before we had even finished the initial assessment, and after repeated unsuccessful attempts to revive him with shock paddles, the attending surgeon decided to open his chest in order to perform direct heart massage. When we opened his chest, a piece of his lung the size of my fist fell onto the table in front of me. At that moment we all knew that this kid was dead and there was nothing we could do about it. Everything stopped, and we all just stood there, silent and still, staring at the dead child laying on the table in front of us.

After a long ten seconds, the staff doctor says: "Okay. We're done. Lehman, sew him back together so he's ready for the morgue." The rest of the team left, I stayed with the body, and the staff doctor walked into the waiting room to tell the kid's mother. I could hear the little boy's mother screaming hysterically while I finished my task, and then I had to move on to the next patient with no time or space for processing of any kind.

The same thing can happen when the memory gets activated in the future – you try to process it, but you again don't have time or emotional space. For example, in situations such as combat or ongoing Emergency Room trauma service, painful experiences keep piling up. Unless very deliberate efforts are made, even a person with adequate voluntary capacity and maturity brain skills can fall behind in his processing.

Immanuel thoughts regarding processing at level 3: Jesus is the best possible source of voluntary capacity and level 3 skill augmentation. Immanuel is always present, even when our family or friends are not. He loves us with perfect love and has beyond-elder maturity, so he is always glad to be with us, even when we are in pain. He has infinite capacity to *stay*

with us, no matter what kind of experiences we are dealing with. And He is the ultimate master with respect to maturity skills, and is therefore always able to initiate attunement and help us regain access to our relational connection circuits, recover the relational aspect of our selves, re-establish attuned relational connection, and re-establish relational connection joy. To the extent we are able to perceive the Lord's presence, connect with Him, and synchronize with Him, we will have the best possible attuned relational connection for augmenting both our voluntary capacity and our level 3 maturity skills.

D. Level 4 – maintaining your identity and navigating the situation in a satisfactory way: As you move through a painful experience, the most important level 4 processing task is to maintain your identity – to maintain your true heart as the source of discernment and choices – to act like your true self. An important connection, with many implications, is that maintaining your true heart as the source of discernment and choices (acting like your true self) *coincides with being able to handle the situation in a way that you will feel good about.* This is a deep, complex point, that merits a much longer discussion, but let me provide an example that is especially helpful in getting a feel for this connection. Let us imagine that I am encountering a complex, difficult, painful situation where I do *not* know how to handle the problems in front of me. Initially, this looks like an example where maintaining my true heart/acting like my true self would *not* coincide with knowing how to handle the situation, because even though I feel overwhelmed and inadequate, and do not know how to handle the specific problems in front of me, I can still maintain my true heart and act like my true self – instead of getting defensive and making choices that protect myself at the expense of others, I can choose to be humble, vulnerable, transparent, and self sacrificial. I can acknowledge that I do not know how to handle the situation, I can take responsibility for my limitations, and I can make choices that protect others even though they might be costly for myself.

I'm claiming that these two pieces always coincide, but this example of a situation in which I *am* able to maintain my true heart *but am not able to handle the problems in front of me* would appear to prove the opposite.

However, when we look at this example more closely, we will realize that it is actually a *perfect* example of “acting like your true self” and “knowing how to handle the situation” being two sides of the same coin. The deeper, bigger challenge in this scenario is: “What do I do when I encounter a complex, difficult, painful situation in which I do not know how to navigate the specific problems in front of me – do I run away and abandon any others involved in the situation? Do I get defensive? Do I find somebody to blame?” And the answer to this deeper, bigger challenge is: “Choose to be humble, vulnerable, transparent, and self sacrificial. Acknowledge that I do not know how to handle the situation, take responsibility for my limitations, and make choices that protect others even though they might be costly for myself.” And the second piece would be: “Afterwards, I'll find someone who knows how to handle these specific problems that I didn't know what to do with, and learn from her so that I'll be better equipped next time.” As I thought about this example carefully, I realized that even though it would not feel good to be overwhelmed and not know how to deal with the *specific* problems, it would feel satisfying at a deeper level to be able to navigate “what do I do when I don't know what to do?” I realized that this example is actually one of the best illustrations of how “acting like your true self” and “being able to navigate the situation in a way that is satisfying” are two aspects of the same phenomena.

My current understanding is that maintaining your true heart/acting like your true self will *always, inherently* result in choices that are satisfying at the deepest levels. Furthermore, you can never navigate a situation satisfactorily without also acting like your true self *because it is inherently unsatisfying to abandon your true heart.*

Let me provide another example with concrete specifics. In my Junior High English class we had a spelling test each week, and I managed to get 100% on every test by spending two to three hours/week going over the list of spelling words. Eventually, I got tired of the boring, tedious study time, but I had become very attached to my reputation as the best student in the class. At this same time I also realized from observing some of my classmates that it seemed to be quite easy to cheat. So I decided to cheat so that I could skip the study time but still hold onto my reputation as the best student.

When it came to the test day and I had not studied, one option was to go ahead with my plan to cheat, which would avoid the immediate embarrassment of doing poorly on the test but would also require that I abandon my integrity and betray my true heart. Sadly, this is the option I chose to take, and it did, indeed, provide short term, superficial relief and avoidance of pain; but then this subtle, deeper, and persistent bad feeling caught up with me. I got an “A” at the top of my test paper, and avoided the embarrassment of the teacher asking “What happened, Karl? You usually get the highest score in the class – where did this 75% come from?;” but at a deeper and more important level it felt unsatisfying to abandon my integrity and betray my true heart by cheating.

On the day of the test a second option would have been to answer honestly and do poorly on the test, which would have maintained my integrity and my true heart but would also have required painful and humbling honesty. With this option there would have been short term, superficial pain; but afterwards I would have enjoyed a subtle, deeper, and persistent good feeling. I would have had to face the painful mortification of getting a “C” at the top of my test paper and my teacher asking her embarrassing question. One of my classmates might even have grabbed my paper and announced to the class: “Hey everybody, Karl only got 75% and I got 83% – I scored higher than Karl!” But at a deeper and more important level it would have felt satisfying to do the hard thing required to maintain my integrity and my true heart.

Another interesting aspect of the connection between finding a satisfying way to navigate the situation and maintaining your true heart as the source of discernment and decisions has to do with what it feels like when you are *not* able to successfully complete level 4 processing. When we fail to complete level 4 processing, our subjective experience is usually *not* being distressed by the awareness that we are not “acting like our true selves” – that we are not discerning and choosing from our true hearts. *Occasionally* there will be an aspect of the experience where this will be easy to feel, such as when you choose to cheat or steal, and you can perceive the loss of your integrity and betrayal of your true self as an unpleasant subjective feeling; but the *usual* subjective experience when we are unable to complete level 4 processing is “I don’t know how to handle this situation. I feel inadequate.”⁵³ To put this another way, we are fairly likely to notice the emotional pain of not being able to handle a

⁵³ As I have been deliberately thinking about this issue from the perspective of maintaining my true heart, I have become increasing able to directly perceive the emotional pain of losing my true heart as the source of discernment and decisions, but initially it was much easier for me to recognize the emotional pain of not knowing how to handle a situation and of feeling inadequate.

situation and feeling inadequate, whereas most of us will usually *not* directly perceive when we have lost our true hearts as the source of discernment and decisions. One very practical application of this connection is that the emotional pain of not knowing how to handle a situation and of feeling inadequate is usually a better *indicator* – a better *signal* for alerting us to the presence of unfinished level 4 processing tasks.

Successful processing at level 4: You have successfully completed level 4 processing for a given painful experience when you feel like you could encounter a similar situation, act like your true self, and navigate the situation in such a way that you would be satisfied with your choices and behavior. In the best case scenario, you have *optimal* level 4 maturity skills, and handle the situation in a satisfactory way the first time you encounter it. You maintain your true heart, and navigate the situation in such a way that you are satisfied with your own choices and behavior. Even though the situation is painful, after it is all over you feel good about how you handled the situation. As soon as you get through the experience, you think about it briefly, and conclude: “That was really painful, but I feel good about how I handled it.” In the next best case scenario, you have *adequate* level 4 maturity skills. You are unsatisfied with how you handled the situation at the first encounter, but you are able to complete level 4 processing afterwards – as soon as you are through the experience, you are able to think about it and figure out a satisfactory way in which you could have handled the situation, *and you are able to mentally re-enter the experience, including re-connecting with the negative emotions,*⁵⁴ *and feel that you could implement the new plan if you were actually in the experience.* You feel like you could encounter a similar situation in the future, implement the new plan, and be satisfied with how you handled the situation.

Adequate voluntary capacity: Being able to successfully complete level 4 processing requires enough voluntary capacity, so that you choose to stay with the pain *long enough* to complete level 4 processing tasks. When you are processing at level 3 or above, you become consciously aware of the painful experience and need to make a *conscious choice* to stay with it. If you have adequate voluntary capacity (you are able to handle the intensity and duration of the pain, and choose to stay with the painful experience), you can then attempt the level 4 processing task of finding a satisfactory way to navigate the situation.⁵⁵

If you do *not* have adequate voluntary capacity to stay with the pain, you will choose to escape the pain, and this will end the processing attempt. In some situations you can stop the painful experience by escaping in some way. For example, if you are in a social situation and are becoming increasingly uncomfortable because you don’t know how to handle the teasing that is being pointed in your direction, you can just get up and leave the party. In other situations, you may not be able to stop the painful experience while it is actually happening. For example, if you are getting robbed at gun point, and feel both frightened and painfully inadequate because you do not know how to handle the situation, you can not stop the painful

⁵⁴ Level 4 processing issues will *not* be resolved if you only figure out, *theoretically*, what you should have done. For this “afterwards” level 4 processing to be complete, you need to be able to run a simulation of the proposed satisfying response *while being inside the memory and feeling the negative emotions*.

⁵⁵ For those familiar with THRIVE language, the task of finding a satisfactory way to navigate the situation is the same thing as finding the answer to “what is it like me and my people to do in this situation?”

experience by asking the mugger to put his gun away. In either case, as soon as the painful experience is over, if you do *not* have adequate voluntary capacity, instead of choosing to stay with the pain and continue trying to process the experience you will choose to shut the pain down and end the processing attempt.

Adequate level 4 maturity skills: Being able to successfully complete level 4 processing also requires enough level 4 maturity skills, so that you are *able* to complete level 4 tasks. If you have adequate *voluntary capacity* (you are able to handle the intensity and duration of the pain, and choose to stay with the painful experience), you can then attempt the level 4 processing task of finding a satisfactory way to navigate the situation; and if you also have adequate level 4 *skills*, your level 4 processing attempt will be successful. If you do *not* have adequate maturity skills to successfully complete level 4 processing, you will eventually realize you are stuck, and will then choose to escape the pain and end the processing attempt.

Community augmentation for level 4 processing: Just as with level 3 processing, community can augment your voluntary capacity and maturity skills for level 4 processing. With respect to voluntary capacity, attuned relational connection with someone who is glad to be with you in your pain, and who has the capacity to *stay* with you, will provide augmentation. In fact, attuned relational connection with an external other will *always* augment both your involuntary and voluntary capacity, regardless of what task you are facing or what situation you are in. It always helps to feel that someone is *with* you, and to know that they are glad to be with you. With respect to level 4 maturity skills, if you are in a situation that you do not know how to handle, but there is somebody else present who *does* know how to navigate the situation and who is modeling the appropriate response, you can augment your level 4 skills by simply following her example. Even if you do *not* have adequate voluntary capacity and/or level 4 skills, adequate community can augment your capacity and skills, and thereby enable you to complete level 4 processing.

Failed level 4 processing → painful experience becomes traumatic experience, traumatic memory: Unfortunately, we are often in situations where we do not have adequate voluntary capacity and/or adequate maturity skills, *and where we are also without adequate augmentation from our community*. This takes us back to choosing to end the processing attempt. Whether you are choosing to end the processing attempt because you can't stand the pain or because you realize you are stuck, the most basic way to implement this choice is simply to move your conscious focus of attention to something else – “just don't think about it.” If the neurological tools for simply *choosing* to change your focus of attention are not adequate, you can use whatever other tools you have discovered to help you turn away from unresolved pain. Again, some of the techniques people use for temporary pain management are constructive, such as prayer, relaxation techniques, or immersing themselves in important tasks; and other pain management techniques are destructive, such as pornography and masturbation, binge eating, alcohol, cocaine, etc.

Just as with processing at level 3, you can *temporarily* stop the pain by moving your conscious attention onto something else, but the unprocessed painful experience will then be stored as a traumatic memory. When you store a painful experience before completing level 4 processing, the traumatic memory file will include both the unfinished task of figuring out how to handle the situation and the level 4 pain of feeling inadequate, and this unfinished task and painful feeling of inadequacy will then come forward as part of the traumatic content

every time the memory is activated. And you will be afraid to face similar situations in the future because you will expect a similarly painful, “I don’t know how to handle the situation” experience.

Level 4 processing for *traumatic memories*: Level 4 processing for *traumatic memories* is very similar to level 4 processing for *original painful experiences*. At each point in the future that the memory gets activated, you have another opportunity to finish level 4 processing tasks, and the most important task remains the same – to maintain your true heart as the source of your discernment and choices, and to find a satisfying way to handle the situation.

If your voluntary capacity is still inadequate, you will choose to shut the pain down and stuff the unresolved material back into its memory file before you have time to successfully complete this processing. If you have adequate capacity but your skills are still inadequate, even if you initially stay with the memory in another attempt to finish level 4 processing you will eventually realize that you are stuck. You will then shut the pain down and stuff the unresolved material back into its memory file. However, if you try to resolve the traumatic memory at some point in the future and you have developed strong voluntary capacity and level 4 maturity skills since the time of the original experience, as the memory comes forward through your social/emotional processing system *you will choose to stay with the pain, and from inside the memory – while feeling the emotional pain – you will be able to maintain your true heart and you will run an internal simulation of successfully navigating the original painful experience*. When you successfully complete these level 4 processing tasks, the emotional pain of not knowing how to handle the problem and of feeling inadequate will be replaced by the satisfaction of being able to navigate a difficult, painful situation in a way that feels good.

*And if you do successfully complete level 4 processing for the memory, then **this aspect** of the traumatic memory will be permanently resolved.*

Summary of conditions for level 4 processing failure: You will be unable to successfully complete level 4 processing of the painful experience (at the time it occurs, or at any time the memory of the unresolved experiences gets activated) if:

Level 1 has been unable to maintain organized attachment: As discussed above, disorganized attachment at level 1 will completely disrupt any attempts to process at levels 3, 4, or 5. You must be able to maintain one of the forms of organized attachment at level 1 in order to successfully complete processing at levels 3, 4, or 5.

You don’t have adequate involuntary capacity, and therefore level 2 implements dissociative disconnection: As mentioned above, if the person has inadequate involuntary capacity, unconscious, involuntary level 2 processes can cause emotional disconnection or route the content to an alternative pathway. This can happen either at the time of the original experience or whenever the memory for an unresolved painful experience gets activated. You obviously cannot complete level 4 processing if you cannot remain emotionally connected or retain the experience in your normal conscious awareness.

You have been unable to successfully complete level 3 processing: If you think about

it carefully, you will realize that access to your relational connection circuits, the presence of the relational aspect of yourself, maintenance of attuned relational connection, and maintenance of relational connection joy *are necessary prerequisites for maintaining your true heart/acting like your true self*. It is therefore inherently impossible to successfully complete level 4 processing without access to your relational connection circuits, the presence of the relational aspect of yourself,...etc, and therefore also *inherently impossible to successfully complete level 4 processing if you have not successfully completed level 3 processing*.

From the perspective of information processing, failure to complete processing at level 3 will always result in passing distorted information forward to levels 4 and 5. When processing is being successfully completed at level 3, the waves of information passing forward/upward from level 3 to level 4 will include access to your relational connection circuits, presence of the relational aspect of your self, attuned relational connection, and relational connection joy. In contrast, if you are in a difficult situation that is causing levels 1 and 2 to generate distressing emotions, and your level 3 has *not* been able to maintain access to your relational connection circuits, then the waves of information being passed forward to levels 4 and 5 will contain information that has been processed *without access to your relational connection circuits*. The waves of information being passed forward to levels 4 and 5 will contain negative emotions *without the relational aspect of yourself, attuned relational connection, or relational connection joy*. When this happens, the higher levels must try to complete their processing tasks while operating on significantly distorted information. Unfortunately, this always seems to result in distorted end products and unsuccessful processing.⁵⁶

Describing the same problem from a more subjective, experiential perspective: if you cannot maintain access to your relational connection circuits, retain the relational aspect of yourself, maintain attuned relational connection, and maintain relational connection joy while going through a painful experience, you are not going to get through it and say: “I feel satisfied with how that went.” If you cannot maintain access to your relational connection circuits,...etc while trying to process a traumatic memory, you will not be able to work *inside* the memory, feel the emotional pain, maintain your true heart, and run an internal simulation of successfully navigating the original painful experience. And you will not be able to think about encountering a similar situation in the future and say “I think I could handle that in a way that would be satisfactory.”

You don’t have adequate voluntary capacity, and therefore choose to shut things down before level 4 processing is complete: As with level 3, if you have inadequate voluntary capacity, you will choose to not stay with the pain *long enough* – you will choose to shut things down before level 4 processing has been completed. Even if you have enough level 4 skill that you would be *able* to find a satisfactory way to handle the situation, if you cannot handle the intensity and/or duration of the pain (including the pain of initially not knowing what to do and feeling inadequate), you will choose to shut things down before you have *time* to find a satisfying solution. For example, the memory of a

⁵⁶ When VERY well trained, the higher levels can compare the information from level 3 with known-to-be-true memories about the people involved and/or similar situations, and then recognize that they are receiving distorted content, but the distorted content *will still feel true and will still block successful processing*.

traumatic experience gets activated, but you still do not have adequate voluntary capacity, and therefore continue to be unable to handle the emotional pain in this particular traumatic memory. You therefore immediately choose to shift the focus of your conscious attention away from the painful memory, before you even have a chance to try finding a better way to navigate the situation. As mentioned above, if the neurological mechanisms for simply choosing to shift the focus of your attention are not adequate, you can employ whatever other tools you have learned to shut the memory down and move on with life. The memory gets shut down, so that the triggered thoughts and emotions are no longer active in the present, but it remains unprocessed. It goes back into its original traumatic memory file, as opposed to being resolved (in which case the modified file would be stored as a non-traumatic memory).

You don't have adequate level 4 skills, and are therefore unable to find a satisfactory way to navigate the situation: If you do not have adequate level 4 maturity skills you will not be able to find a satisfactory way to navigate the situation – you will be unsatisfied with how you handled the situation at the time it originally occurred, and afterwards you will be unable to figure out “How should I have handled that? How will I handle a similar situation in the future?” Even if you have adequate capacity and *could* continue to stay with the pain (including the level 4 pain of feeling of inadequate), if you do not have the skills to find an acceptable solution you will eventually realize “this isn't going anywhere,” and will then decide to shut down the processing attempt by moving your conscious attention onto something else. As mentioned above, this will temporarily stop the pain, but the unprocessed painful experience will then be stored as a traumatic memory.

Unless you obtain additional level 4 skills, you will go through this same process every time the memory gets activated. For example, the memory gets activated, and you stew on it for an hour, but still aren't able to resolve the level 4 “How should I handle a situation like this?” Eventually, you decide that you aren't succeeding in your attempt to resolve the problem, and then choose to shift the focus of your conscious attention away from the traumatic memory. The memory gets shut down, so that the triggered thoughts and emotions are no longer active in the present, but it remains unprocessed; and it is once again stored as a traumatic memory file, as opposed to being resolved (in which case the modified file would be stored as a non-traumatic memory).

You don't have adequate community: As discussed above, If the intensity and complexity of a painful situations exceeds your voluntary capacity and level 4 skills, *you can still complete level 4 processing if you get help from your community*. Synchronizing with someone who has the overall maturity to be glad to be with you in your painful emotions, and who has the capacity to *stay* with you in your painful emotions, will augment your *voluntary capacity*; and following the example of someone who is modeling the appropriate response in a difficult situation will augment your level 4 *skills*. You will *not* be able to complete level 4 processing if your level 4 capacity and/or skills are inadequate *and you are also without adequate augmentation from your community*.

You don't have time/emotional space to get through the processing: As discussed above in the section on level 3 processing, some situations do not provide adequate time or emotional space to complete the processing tasks, and this can happen both at the time

of the original trauma or when the memory is activated in the future. Medical school and combat are two of the most dramatic examples, but this problem with limited time and/or emotional space can also occur in many other contexts. Think about urban police officers, highway patrol officers, firemen, ambulance drivers, emergency medical technicians, staff in high intensity emergency rooms, staff on critical care units, and child protection agency workers. These people often encounter a steady stream of very heavy situations, and often do not have adequate time or emotional space to process the pain, suffering, intensity, and horror that they are exposed to.

Furthermore, this problem with limited time and/or emotional space can also occur in much more subtle ways. For example, let's say you have a divorced mother with several young children. Even though she gets some financial support from her x-husband, she still has to work part time, as well as dealing with all the challenges of single parenting when the kids are with her. Each day is full, often to the point of being overwhelming, with very little time or emotional energy around the edges. Within this larger context, she encounters a steady stream of experiences that are not catastrophic or life-threatening, but that are still painful and that she does not immediately know how to handle. One week, her eight year old son, John, complains that some of his toys are missing, and tells her that he thinks one of his friends from church has stolen them. Does she encourage her son to ask the other child if he has stolen the toys? What should John do if the other child denies it but he remains convinced? Does she talk to the other child's parents regarding her sons suspicions? And what about the possibility that John has simply lost the toys? At this point, *if she had the time and emotional space*, she could ask the Lord for guidance, talk to John about his preferences and fears regarding the situation, obtain counsel from others in her community, carefully consider the issues involved, run internal mental simulations of the different ways in which she might handle the situation, and eventually discern a response that would be satisfying.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, she does not have the time or emotional energy to do this. She has ten things to do in the next hour before taking her children to the babysitter so that she can get to work, and her six year old and four years old daughters have just begun screaming and fighting in the next room. So she replies "I think your toys are probably just lost, and even if Jason did steal them, you just need to forgive him." Her son feels invalidated and unprotected, turns away from her in obvious displeasure, and states that he doesn't want to talk to her any more. She feels a persistent sense of dis-satisfaction and inadequacy during the next several days as she thinks about the problem in brief snatches, but she eventually decides that she needs to move on to more pressing tasks and problems, and the whole unpleasant situation gets packaged away as an unresolved painful experience.

The next week, her six year old daughter, Mary, comes in crying, reporting that she was playing with friends down the block and was bitten by their dog. Her daughter says that the dog was off it's leash (against neighborhood rules), and that the kids who owned the dog had refused to put it back on the leash, even though it had started nipping. She has a very minor wound, but it *is* bleeding, and the mother decides she had better take Mary to

⁵⁷ In this example we are assuming that she has adequate voluntary capacity and level 4 skills, so that she would be able to successfully complete the level 4 tasks as long as she has adequate time and emotional energy to get the job done.

the pediatric clinic just to be safe. Mary ends up getting a tetanus shot, and by the time they are done with the visit and the shot, it costs more than \$100. As soon as she returns from the clinic, the mother goes down the block to speak with the kids who own the dog. The dog is still off it's leash, but the kids claim that it bit Mary because she had been teasing it. She does not have any clear sense of who's telling the truth, so does she believe Mary or these other kids? Should she talk to the parents about the whole scenario and ask them to take responsibility for the medical bill? Should she consider talking to a lawyer? Should she threaten to have the dog "put down"? At this point, *if she had the time and emotional space*, she could ask the Lord for guidance, talk to Mary about her preferences and fears regarding the situation, obtain counsel from others in her community, carefully consider the issues involved, run internal mental simulations of the different ways in which she might handle the situation, and eventually discern a response that would be satisfying.

Unfortunately, she does not have the time or emotional energy to do this. She has fourteen things to do in the next two hours before taking her children to the babysitter so that she can get to work, and there are also many additional tasks that need to be taken care of before friends come to visit for the weekend. So she tells the kids that she will have their dog taken to the pound if it doesn't stay on it's leash, and when she gets home she tells Mary not to tease the dog. Mary starts crying, and repeating: "I didn't tease the dog, I didn't tease the dog, I didn't tease the dog." The mother feels a persistent sense of dis-satisfaction and inadequacy during the next several days as she thinks about the problem in brief snatches, but she eventually decides that she needs to move on to more pressing tasks and problems, and the whole unpleasant situation gets packaged away as another unresolved painful experience.

And the next week...., and the next week...., etc. Nobody is dying, nobody is seriously injured, nobody has been kidnaped, and the house is not burning down – these experiences are not catastrophic, horrific, or life-threatening – but they are still painful and she is definitely not satisfied with how she has handled them. She is occasionally able to go back and work out better resolutions for some of these unpleasant scenarios, but in general she encounters new difficult situations before she has been able to resolve the old ones, and a pile of traumatic memories for painful experiences with unresolved level 4 content slowly accumulates.

Immanuel thoughts regarding processing at level 4: Jesus is the best possible source of level 4 capacity and skill augmentation. His love is perfect, His maturity is complete, and His capacity is infinite, so He is always glad to be with us, He is always offering attunement, and He is always able to stay with us. Receiving attunement from Jesus provides the best possible augmentation for anyone with inadequate voluntary capacity. Jesus is also the ultimate master with respect to level 4 skills for handling difficult situations,⁵⁸ and He is an excellent teacher, mentor, model, and leader. He is brilliant, creative, appropriate, and kind, and can be both gentle and firm as needed. Observing/synchronizing with Jesus and following His example provides the best possible augmentation for anyone with inadequate level 4 maturity skills.

⁵⁸ I think perfectly navigating the redemption of the world through crucifixion and carrying the sins of all mankind provides pretty good evidence that Jesus can handle difficult situations.

Furthermore, Immanuel is always present, even when there is no one in your community who can help you with a particular level 4 processing problem.

An especially cool point here is that Jesus can model level 4 solutions from the *inside* of traumatic memories. Others in our community can be with us in the *original difficult situations*, and can therefore augment our level 4 skills by providing examples that we can follow *while we are in the original situations*. However, others in our community cannot provide modeling for us inside traumatic memories. Only Jesus can be with us *inside traumatic memories*, and thereby augment our level 4 skills by providing examples we can follow *while we are working inside the memories*. We have seen the Lord work with people *inside* traumatic memories, and provide level 4 skill augmentation by very deliberately and explicitly modeling: “This is how you could handle the situation, should you ever encounter it again.”

To the extent we are able to perceive the Lord’s presence and receive His attunement, we will have the best possible augmentation for our voluntary capacity. To the extent we are able to perceive the Lord’s presence, observe/synchronize with Him, and follow His example, we will have the best possible augmentation for our level 4 maturity skills.

E. Level 5 – making sense out of your experience: One of the level 5 processing tasks when encountering a painful experience is to make sense out of it. If you do not have any model or explanation that makes sense out of the experience, you will feel pervasive confusion. Your subjective experience will be “I just don’t understand – this whole situation is so confusing,”⁵⁹ and this confusion will contribute to your emotional pain. Successful level 5 processing finds some way to make sense out of the situation. When you have successfully completed this level 5 processing task, even though an experience is painful, you can still make sense out of it and the level 5 pain of feeling confused will resolve.

If some aspect of the new experience is incompatible with some aspect of your worldview, you will feel a milder form of confusion called cognitive dissonance. Your subjective experience will be to feel an unpleasant, anxious, cognitive tension, and this cognitive dissonance will contribute to the emotional pain in the experience. Successful level 5 processing reformulates your understanding of the painful experience, and/or comes up with a new, reformulated worldview that explains and makes space for the experience. When you have successfully completed this level 5 processing task, even though an experience is painful, you can still fit it into your understanding of the world. The level 5 pain of feeling uncomfortable, confused, and upset because you realize that your experience and your worldview are no longer compatible will resolve when you have completed this level 5 processing task.

As with level 4 processing, level 5 “make sense out of it” processing must also be accomplished *while inside the painful experience and while connected to any emotional pain associated with the experience* – you must be able to formulate and/or access the explanations that make sense out of the experience *while inside the experience, and while connected to any emotional pain associated with the experience*. The explanations that make

⁵⁹ Pervasive confusion is increasingly common with increasing severity of trauma and with decreasing age at the time of trauma.

sense out of the experience must *feel true while inside the experience, and while connected to any emotional pain associated with the experience*. You cannot get through a painful experience, shut down the emotional pain, and then finish level 5 “make sense out of it” processing by analyzing the experience from an external perspective. Analysis from an external perspective, where you generate explanations while *not* feeling the emotional pain associated with the experience, might come up with accurate cognitive understanding, but this cognitive analysis from an external perspective *is not the level 5 processing necessary to resolve the painful experience*.⁶⁰

Adequate voluntary capacity: As with processing at levels 3 and 4, being able to successfully complete level 5 “make sense out of it” processing requires enough voluntary capacity, so that you choose to stay with the pain *long enough* to complete this level 5 processing task. When you are processing at level 3 or above, you become consciously aware of the painful experience and need to make a *conscious choice* to stay with it. If you have adequate voluntary capacity (you are able to handle the intensity and duration of the pain, and choose to stay with the painful experience), you can then attempt the level 5 processing task of making sense out of your experience. If you do *not* have adequate voluntary capacity to stay with the pain, you will choose to escape the pain, and this will end the processing attempt. In some situations you can stop the painful experience by escaping in some way, and in other situations you may not be able to stop the painful experience while it is actually happening. In either case, as soon as the painful experience is over, if you do *not* have adequate voluntary capacity, instead of choosing to stay with the pain and continue trying to process the experience you will choose to shut the pain down and end the processing attempt.

Adequate level 5 maturity skills: As with processing at levels 3 and 4, being able to successfully complete level 5 “make sense out of it” processing also requires enough level 5 maturity skills, so that you are *able* to complete this level 5 task. If you have adequate *voluntary capacity* (you are able to handle the intensity and duration of the pain, and choose to stay with the painful experience), you can then attempt the level 5 processing task of making sense out of the situation; and if you also have adequate level 5 *skills*, your level 5 processing attempt will be successful. If you do *not* have adequate maturity skills to successfully complete level 5 processing, you will eventually realize you are stuck, and then choose to end the processing attempt.

Community augmentation for level 5 “make sense out of it” processing: Just as with processing at levels 3 and 4, community can augment your voluntary capacity and maturity skills for level 5 “make sense out of it” processing. As mentioned above, attuned relational connection with an external other, who is glad to be with you and who has the capacity to *stay* with you, will augment both your involuntary and voluntary capacity regardless of what task you are facing or what situation you are in. With respect to level 5 maturity skills, if you are dealing with an experience that you are not able to understand, but there are others present who *do* know how to make sense out of the situation, they can augment your level 5 skills by providing explanations and/or by providing coaching for observation and analysis. Even if you do not have adequate voluntary capacity and/or level 5 skills, adequate

⁶⁰ These comments about the necessity of completing level 5 processing from *inside* the experience are not based on brain research, but rather on extensive observations during many client sessions and during my own healing work. Dr. Wilder and I are currently working to identify the brain science associated with these observations.

community can augment your capacity and skills, and thereby enable you to complete level 5 “make sense out of it” processing.

Failed level 5 “make sense out of it” processing → painful experience becomes traumatic experience, traumatic memory: Unfortunately, we are often in situations where we do not have adequate voluntary capacity and/or adequate maturity skills, and where we are also without adequate augmentation from our community. This takes us back to choosing to end the processing attempt. Whether you are choosing to end the processing attempt because you can’t stand the pain or because you realize you are stuck, the most basic way to implement this choice is simply to move your conscious focus of attention to something else – “just don’t think about it.” If the neurological tools for simply *choosing* to change your focus of attention are not adequate, you can use whatever other tools you have discovered to help you turn away from unresolved pain.

As with failure to complete processing at lower levels, you can *temporarily* stop the pain by moving your conscious attention onto something else, but the unprocessed painful experience will then be stored as a traumatic memory. When you store a painful experience before completing level 5 “make sense out of it” processing, the traumatic memory file will include both the unfinished task of making sense out of the situation and the level 5 pain of feeling confused, and this unfinished task and painful feeling of confusion will then come forward as part of the traumatic content every time the memory is activated. And you will be afraid to face similar situations in the future because you will expect a similarly painful, “I don’t understand this – I can’t make sense out of this – I’m confused” experience.

Level 5 “make sense out of it” processing for *traumatic memories*: As with processing at levels 3 and 4, level 5 “make sense out of it” processing for *traumatic memories* is very similar to level 5 “make sense out of it” processing for *original painful experiences*. At each point in the future that the memory gets activated, you have another opportunity to finish level 5 “make sense out of it” processing, and the task remains the same – to come up with an explanation that makes sense out of the experience. If your voluntary capacity and/or level 5 maturity skills are still inadequate, and you are also still without adequate community augmentation, you will choose to shut the pain down and stuff the unresolved material back into its memory file. If good things have happened in you and/or your community since the original experience, so that the combination of you and your community *do* have adequate voluntary capacity and level 5 maturity skills, you will be able to take care of unfinished level 5 “make sense out of it” business. As the memory comes forward through your social/emotional processing system *you will chose to stay with the pain, and from inside the memory – while feeling the emotional pain – you will make sense out of the experience.*

Summary of conditions for level 5 “make sense out of it” processing failure: You will be unable to successfully complete level 5 “make sense out of it” processing of the painful experience (at the time it occurs, or at any time the memory of the unresolved experience gets activated in the future) if:

Level 1 has been unable to maintain organized attachment: As discussed above, disorganized attachment at level 1 will completely disrupt any attempts to process at levels 3, 4, or 5. You must be able to maintain one of the forms of organized attachment at level 1 in order to successfully complete processing at levels 3, 4, or 5.

You don't have adequate involuntary capacity, and therefore level 2 implements dissociative disconnection: If the person has inadequate involuntary capacity, then unconscious, involuntary level 2 processes will cause emotional disconnection or route the content into an alternative pathway. This can happen either at the time of the original experience or whenever the memory gets triggered in the future. You cannot complete level 5 "make sense out of it" processing if you cannot remain emotionally connected or retain the experience in your normal conscious awareness.

You have been unable to successfully complete level 3 processing: If you are unable to complete processing at level 3, you will be unable to complete processing at level 4, and if you are unable to complete processing at both levels 3 and 4, you will certainly be unable to successfully complete "make sense out of it" processing at level 5.

If your level 3 has not been able to maintain access to your relational connection circuits, then the waves of information being passed forward to levels 4 and 5 will contain information that has been processed *without access to your relational connection circuits*. Furthermore, failure to complete processing at level 3 will result in failure to complete processing at level 4, so that both levels 3 and 4 will be sending distorted information forward/upward to level 5. Unfortunately, the results always seem to be poor when level 5 is forced to work with this kind of distorted input.

Describing the same problem from a more subjective, experiential perspective: As described above, successful level 5 "make sense out of it" processing requires explanations/models that *feel true from the inside of the experience*. However, careful observations from client sessions and also from my own healing journey indicate that access to our relational connection circuits and the presence of the relational aspect of our selves are *necessary prerequisites* for being able to make sense out of an experience in a way that is free of distortion and that feels true from the inside of the experience. It is not yet clear to me *why* this is so, but it seems to be impossible to make sense out of an experience in a way that is free of distortion and that feels true from the inside without first being able to maintain access to our relational connection circuits and the presence of the relational aspect of ourselves.

You have been unable to successfully complete level 4 processing: If you cannot successfully complete processing at level 4 then you will also be unable to complete "make sense out of it" processing at level 5.

From the perspective of information processing, failure to complete processing at level 4 will always result in passing seriously distorted information forward to level 5. If you are in a difficult situation, and your level 4 has not been able to maintain your true heart as the source of discernment and choices/has not been able to find a satisfying way to handle the problems in front of you, then the waves of information being passed forward to level 5 will contain information that has been processed in the absence of your true heart and in the absence of being able to handle the situation. When level 5 is forced to work with this kind of severely distorted input, the results are poor.

Describing the same problem from a more subjective, experiential perspective: Careful observations from client sessions and also from my own healing journey indicate that

maintaining our true hearts and finding a satisfying way to handle a situation are *necessary prerequisites* for being able to make sense out of an experience in a way that is free of distortion and that *feels* true from the *inside* of the experience. It is not yet clear to me *why* this is so, but it seems to be impossible to make sense out of an experience in a way that is free of distortion and that feels true from the inside without first maintaining our true hearts and finding a satisfying way to handle the situation.

You don't have adequate voluntary capacity, and therefore choose to shut things down before level 5 "make sense out of it" processing is complete: Just as with processing at levels 3 and 4, if you have inadequate voluntary capacity, you will choose to not stay with the pain *long enough* – you will choose to shut things down before level 5 "make sense out of it" processing has been completed. Even if you have enough level 5 skill that you would be *able* to make sense out of the experience and/or reconcile the experience with your worldview, if you cannot handle the intensity and duration of the emotional pain, you will choose to shut things down before you have *time* to successfully complete this level 5 processing task. For example, the memory of a traumatic experience gets activated, but you still do not have adequate voluntary capacity, and therefore continue to be unable to handle the intensity and duration (area under the curve) of the emotional pain. You therefore immediately choose to shift the focus of your conscious attention away from the traumatic memory, before you have a chance to even try finding a way to make sense out of it. As mentioned above, if the neurological mechanisms for simply choosing to shift the focus of your attention are not adequate, you can employ whatever other tools you have learned to shut the memory down and move on with life. The memory gets shut down, so that the triggered thoughts and emotions are no longer active in the present, but it remains unprocessed. It is once again stored as a traumatic memory, as opposed to being resolved, modified, and then stored as a non-traumatic memory.

You don't have adequate level 5 skills, and therefore are *unable* to make sense out of the experience and/or reconcile your experience with your worldview: Just as with processing at levels 3 and 4, if you do not have adequate level 5 skills you will be *unable* to make sense out of the experience and/or reconcile the painful experience with your worldview. For example, after the experience has occurred, you will realize "What just happened to me doesn't fit in with what I believe about the world. There must be something wrong with the way I understand the world (or the way I am understanding this experience)," and you try to figure out some way of re-framing the experience and/or modifying your worldview. Even if you have adequate capacity and *could* continue to stay with the emotional pain, if you do not have the skills to find an acceptable solution you will eventually realize "this isn't going anywhere," and will then decide to shut down the processing attempt by moving your conscious attention onto something else. As mentioned above, this will temporarily stop the pain, but the unprocessed painful experience will then be stored as a traumatic memory.

And unless you obtain additional level 5 skills, you will go through this same process every time the memory gets activated. For example, the memory gets activated, and you stew on it for an hour, but still aren't able to resolve the level 5 "how can I reconcile this memory with my worldview?" Eventually, you decide that you aren't succeeding in your attempt to resolve the problem, and then choose to shift the focus of your conscious

attention away from the traumatic memory. The memory gets shut down, so that the triggered thoughts and emotions are no longer active in the present, but it remains unprocessed. It is once again stored as a traumatic memory, as opposed to being resolved, modified, and then stored as a non-traumatic memory.

You don't have adequate community: Once again, your community can provide supplementary resources. If the intensity and complexity of a painful situations exceeds your voluntary capacity and level 5 skills, *you can still complete level 5 processing if you get help from your community.* Attuned relational connection with someone who has the overall maturity to be glad to be with you in your emotional pain, and who has the capacity to *stay* with you in your pain, will augment both your involuntary and voluntary capacity regardless of what task you're facing or what situation you're in; and receiving explanations and/or observation & analysis coaching will augment your level 5 *skills.* You will *not* be able to complete level 5 "make sense out of it" processing if your voluntary capacity and level 5 skills are inadequate *and you are also without adequate augmentation from your community.*

You don't have time/emotional space to get through the processing: As discussed above in the sections on processing at levels 3 and 4, some situations do not provide adequate time or emotional space to complete the processing tasks, and this can happen both at the time of the original trauma or when the memory is activated in the future. This lack of time/emotional space can be encountered by a surprisingly large number of people, such as soldiers, medical students, urban police officers, state patrol officers, firefighters, ambulance drivers, emergency medical technicians, staff in emergency rooms, staff on critical care units, child protection workers, and overwhelmed single parents who are confronted with a steady stream of problems that they do not immediately know how to handle.

Immanuel thoughts regarding level 5 "make sense out of it" processing: Jesus is the best possible source of voluntary capacity and level 5 maturity skill augmentation. He is always glad to be with us, He is always offering attunement, and He always has the capacity to stay with us; so just as with capacity problems at levels 2, 3, and 4, receiving attunement from Jesus is the best possible augmentation for *capacity* problems at level 5. Jesus is *The Truth*, and He is *The Word* by whom all things were created, so He probably also has enough level 5 *skill* to help us with the level 5 processing task of making sense out of our experiences. Furthermore, Immanuel is always with us, even when we cannot find anyone in our community who can help us with our capacity or level 5 maturity skill problems.

I have seen Jesus provide brilliant, elegant, perfectly nuanced explanations that have helped people resolve some really difficult level 5 "make sense out of it" processing tasks. More than once, a client has asked the Lord a really difficult question, and when she described His response, the client and I looked at each other and exclaimed: "Wow! That was brilliant! Would you ever have thought of that in a million years?" Jesus also has special multi-media resources. For example, as part of level 5 "make sense out of it" processing, people often ask questions along the lines of "I know my mother loves me – so how could she have hurt me like that?" or "How could my Christian father do such a thing?" I always refer these questions to Jesus, and sometimes the person receiving ministry has described a fascinating multi-media historical review in response to her question. For example, one woman reported:

“The Lord is showing me the story of how this pain has come down through my family. I can see my grandfather coming over from Ireland on a boat – as an orphan at the age of 15. The Lord is showing me what he had to do to survive, and what he had to do to support his family when my father was a boy. The Lord is showing me how my grandfather’s pain affected his ability to care for my father, and how this affected my father’s ability to care for me...etc.”

I have also seen Jesus resolve seemingly impossible level 5 “make sense out of it” processing tasks by responding with some form of “Trust Me.” For example, in one session I was facilitating, the person asked something along the lines of “I can see Jesus standing there, so why isn’t He stopping it? Why’s He allowing this horrible, evil thing to happen to me when I’m a defenseless infant? How can the Lord be loving and still allow this kind of thing?” I have read the books explaining how demonic evil and human free will can combine to give us the mess we have here on earth, even in the presence of a loving God, but I wasn’t very hopeful about providing a satisfying answer to this person who was inside a memory of going through a horrible experience as a small child. Fortunately, the Lord was standing right there, so I encouraged him to ask Jesus. The person’s face became calm as he paused for a minute or two, and then he reported: “Jesus says: ‘Your finite mind is not able to comprehend why the Father and I chose to allow this, but I am with you, and because of who I am, that is enough.’”⁶¹ In another situation the person receiving ministry asked a very difficult question about the other person involved in the memory. I could not imagine any possible answer that would be satisfying or helpful. However, this person was also able to perceive the Lord’s presence in the memory, so I encouraged her to ask Him. After pausing for a minute, she reported: “Jesus says that it’s not profitable to pursue an answer to the question I’m asking. He’s not upset or anything – He’s being very gentle and nice about it – but He just says that it’s not profitable.”

*And the key in these situations, where Jesus appears to resolve the level 5 “make sense out of it” processing tasks by asking the people to focus on Him and trust Him, is that **the people receiving ministry are satisfied.***

The powerful impact of perceiving Jesus’ presence and receiving this “trust me” answer directly from Him has been particularly apparent in sessions where the person’s story has stirred me up, so that I totally sympathized with her as she initially felt and expressed outrage towards the Lord, but then she became peaceful and calm – *completely satisfied with the Lord’s answer* – while I remained upset. In a session I still remember quite clearly, the person receiving ministry was working in a memory of being molested by one of her relatives. She was in the basement of her own home, and this person was raping her before taking her to church on Sunday morning. I coached her to try the Immanuel intervention prayer, and she was very quickly able to perceive the Lord’s presence standing right beside her. Being able to see and feel Him next to her was initially reassuring, but eventually she became angry, with the understandable question: “Why are You just standing there, just looking sad? Why don’t you stop this?!” Her story was clearly resonating with some of my own unresolved “why don’t You protect me?” pain because I was right there with her, thinking to myself: “Yeah! Why don’t You do something?!”

⁶¹ This particular scenario is not uncommon. I have observed a number of different people have essentially this same interaction with the Lord.

Fortunately, even though I was triggered, I was still able to coach her to engage directly with Jesus regarding her questions and anger. She closed her eyes, expressed her anger and outrage directly to Jesus, and then gradually became calm as she listened to His response. According to her report, His explanation went something like this: “You’re unable to understand My choice because you don’t yet know the whole story, but when you get to heaven you will understand. It’s like reading a book. Some times, when you’re still in the middle of the book, it doesn’t make sense; but by the time you get to the end of the book, and have read the rest of the story, you can look back and see how everything fits together. This is like that. When you get to heaven, and know the rest of the story, you’ll understand. In the mean time, I want you to trust Me.” *And she seemed to accept this answer!* Her anger and outrage had completely resolved. She was now focusing on the Lord’s presence, appreciating His love, and appearing to be quite peaceful.

I, on the other hand, was still upset. “That’s not okay with me, Lord! How can You claim to be a good and loving God, and then just stand there while this is happening? If I had been there I sure wouldn’t have just stood there doing nothing – I would have picked up a 2-by-4 and whacked that dude up side his head!...etc.” It was quite an interesting scene. Here’s the person who actually suffered as the victim of this horrible evil, talking to me from *inside* the memory, and she’s calmly trying to explain why it’s really okay. She was very patiently repeating her explanation from four or five different perspectives, while I was asking questions more in the direction of “how can you perceive the Lord as anything other than incompetent and uncaring?” Eventually, as I was able to perceive the Lord’s healing presence working in her, I was able to return to the foundational truth that He is with us, and because of Who He is, that is enough. But it was quite apparent that the “trust Me” explanation was much more powerful for her, as she perceived Jesus’ presence and heard it directly from Him, than it was for me, as I received it “second hand” through her report.

To the extent we are able to perceive the Lord’s presence, connect with Him, and synchronize with Him, we will have the best possible augmentation for our voluntary capacity and our level 5 maturity skills.

F. Level 5 – interpreting the meaning with respect to yourself: An especially important level 5 processing task is correctly interpreting the *meaning of the experience with respect to yourself*, and one of the most important ways in which a person can fail to successfully complete level 5 processing is to come up with *distorted, erroneous* interpretations. For those familiar with Theophostic®: ***This is where lies come in!*** Trauma-associated lies are created when faulty processing at level 5 comes up with distorted, erroneous interpretations regarding “what is the meaning of this experience with respect to me?”

Successful level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing: Successful level 5 processing comes up with correct interpretations regarding the meaning of the experience with respect to oneself. When you’ve successfully completed this level 5 processing task, even though an experience is painful, you will still correctly interpret it’s meaning and any level 5 pain associated with distorted interpretations will resolve.

In the ideal scenario, you have strong level 5 skills enabling you to quickly and smoothly come to correct interpretations, without any initial, temporary distorted interpretations. For example, when the kid who was hit at 60 m.p.h. died on the table in front of us, it was very

painful, but I immediately knew that we had done everything possible and that his death was not due to any errors or inadequacies on my part. I felt sad, but I did not conclude that it was my fault and feel left-sided guilt, or conclude that I was incompetent and feel left-sided shame. With respect to this one particular aspect of the experience, I was able to quickly and smoothly come to correct interpretations.

In the more common scenario, you have adequate voluntary capacity and level 5 skills enabling you to eventually come to correct conclusions regarding the meaning of the experience, but there is a part of the processing journey during which you temporarily consider a variety of distorted interpretations. In many painful experiences, part of the emotional pain comes from these distorted interpretations that we consider temporarily, and to the extent they *feel* true during this processing phase *we will experience the corresponding negative left-sided emotions*.

In the scenarios closest to level 5 processing failure, you come to distorted interpretations that you initially believe to be true, but then you are able to correct the erroneous conclusions before abandoning your attempt to process the experience.

As with level 4 processing and level 5 “make sense out of it” processing, level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing must also be accomplished *while inside the painful experience and while connected to any emotional pain associated with the experience* – you must be able to formulate and/or access the correct interpretations regarding the meaning of the experience *while inside the experience, and while connected to any emotional pain associated with the experience*. The correct interpretations regarding the meaning of the experience must *feel* true *while inside the experience, and while connected to any emotional pain associated with the experience*. You cannot get through a painful experience, shut down the emotional pain, and then finish level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing by analyzing the experience from an external perspective. Analysis from an external perspective, where you generate interpretations while *not* feeling the emotional pain associated with the experience, might come up with accurate cognitive understanding regarding the meaning of the experience, *but this cognitive analysis from an external perspective is not the level 5 processing necessary to resolve the painful experience*.

Adequate voluntary capacity:

Adequate level 5 maturity skills:

Community augmentation for level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing: One of the most important functions of parents and community with respect to painful experiences in childhood is to help the child correctly interpret the meaning of the painful experience.

Failed level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing → painful experience becomes traumatic experience, traumatic memory: Unfortunately, we are often in situations where we do not have adequate voluntary capacity and/or adequate maturity skills, and where we are also without adequate augmentation from our community. When the combination of voluntary capacity, level 5 skill, and community augmentation is inadequate, we will come to initial distorted interpretations and then not be able to correct them. If we have inadequate voluntary capacity we will eventually shut down the processing attempt in order to stop the pain, and if we have inadequate maturity skills we will eventually realize that we are stuck and shut down

the processing attempt because we are not getting anywhere, but either way, we will abandon our processing attempts while still retaining distorted interpretations that have not been corrected. These experiences will then be stored as traumatic memories, and these traumatic memories will include the unresolved distorted interpretations and the corresponding negative left-sided emotions. These erroneous interpretations and negative emotions will come forward as part of the traumatic content every time the memory is activated, and we will be afraid to face situations similar to the original experience because we will expect similarly painful distorted interpretations and corresponding negative emotions.

For example, how does a child make sense out of being sexually abused by trusted family members? What conclusions will she come to as she tries to interpret the meaning of these experiences? Unfortunately, children have notoriously weak level 5 “interpret the meaning” maturity skills, and sexual abuse is usually hidden so that no one in the child’s community knows to help her with interpreting the meaning of the experience. Inadequate maturity skill and lack of community augmentation result in faulty level 5 processing, which comes up with distorted, erroneous interpretations, such as: “I know Daddy is good, so I must be so bad that I make good people do bad things,” “Mommy is always right, so I must deserve to be treated like this,” or “I’m guilty too, since I didn’t stop it.” The child is not able to correct these erroneous, toxic conclusions, and the unresolved content is then stored in traumatic memories that will contain the distorted interpretations and their corresponding negative emotions.

Level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing for *traumatic memories*: As with all processing tasks, level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing for *traumatic memories* is very similar to level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing for *original painful experiences*. Each time the memory is activated, you will have another chance to successfully complete this processing, and the task will be the same – to correctly interpret the meaning of the experience with respect to your self. When dealing with these traumatic memories that already include distorted interpretations, this will always mean “replacing distorted, erroneous interpretations with correct interpretations.”

If your voluntary capacity and/or level 5 maturity skills are still inadequate, and you are also still without adequate community augmentation, you will choose to shut the pain down and stuff the unresolved material back into its memory file. If good things have happened in you and/or your community since the original experience, so that the combination of you and your community *do* have adequate voluntary capacity and level 5 “interpret the meaning” maturity skills, you will be able to take care of this unfinished business. As the memory comes forward through your social/emotional processing system *you will chose to stay with the pain, and from inside the memory – while feeling the emotional pain – you will replace the distorted, erroneous interpretations with accurate conclusions regarding the meaning of the experience with respect to yourself.*

Summary of conditions for level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing failure: You will be unable to successfully complete level 5 “interpret the meaning” processing of the painful experience (at the time it occurs, or at any time the memory of the unresolved experience gets activated in the future) if:

Level 1 has been unable to maintain organized attachment: As discussed above, disorganized attachment at level 1 will completely disrupt any attempts to process at

levels 3, 4, or 5. You must be able to maintain one of the forms of organized attachment at level 1 in order to successfully complete processing at levels 3, 4, or 5.

You don't have adequate involuntary capacity, and therefore level 2 implements dissociative disconnection: If the person has inadequate involuntary capacity, then unconscious, involuntary level 2 processes will cause emotional disconnection or route the content to an alternative pathway. This can happen either at the time of the original experience or whenever the memory gets triggered in the future. You cannot complete level 5 "interpret the meaning" processing if you cannot remain emotionally connected or retain the experience in your normal conscious awareness.

You have been unable to successfully complete level 3 processing: If you are unable to complete processing at level 3, you will be unable to complete processing at level 4, and if you are unable to complete processing at both levels 3 and 4, you will certainly be unable to successfully complete "interpret the meaning" processing at level 5.

If you are in a difficult situation that is causing levels 1 and 2 to generate distressing emotions, and your level 3 has not been able to maintain access to your relational connection circuits, then the waves of information being passed forward to levels 4 and 5 will contain information that has been processed *without access to your relational connection circuits*. Furthermore, failure to complete processing at level 3 will result in failure to complete processing at level 4, so that both levels 3 and 4 will be sending distorted information forward/upward to level 5. Unfortunately, the results always seem to be poor when level 5 is forced to work with this kind of distorted input.

Describing the same problem from a more subjective, experiential perspective: As described above, successful level 5 "interpret the meaning" processing requires interpretations that *feel true from the inside of the experience*. However, careful observations from client sessions and also from my own healing journey indicate that access to our relational connection circuits and the presence of the relational aspect of our selves are *necessary prerequisites* for being able to interpret the meaning of an experience in a way that is free of distortion and that feels true from the inside of the experience. It is not yet clear to me *why* this is so, but it seems to be impossible to interpret the meaning of an experience in a way that is free of distortion and that feels true from the inside without first being able to maintain access to our relational connection circuits and the presence of the relational aspect of ourselves.

You have been unable to successfully complete level 4 processing: If you cannot successfully complete processing at level 4 then you will also be unable to complete "interpret the meaning" processing at level 5.

From the perspective of information processing, failure to complete processing at level 4 will always result in passing seriously distorted information forward to level 5. If you are in a difficult situation, and your level 4 has not been able to maintain your true heart as the source of discernment and choices/has not been able to find a satisfying way to handle the problems in front of you, then the waves of information being passed forward to level 5 will contain information that has been processed in the absence of your true heart and in the absence of being able to handle the situation.

In addition to maintaining your true heart and finding a satisfying way to handle the situation, level 4 processing is also supposed to accomplish a number of other important tasks that have not been discussed in this essay, and failure to complete these tasks will contribute additional distortion to the information being passed forward to level 5. One of these important tasks is to contribute the subjective perception that you are part of the experience – the *feeling* that the experience is actually *happening to you*.⁶² If level 4 fails to accomplish this task, the information passing forward to level 5 will contain the perception that you are observing the events as a detached bystander, as opposed to actually being *in* them. Other important level 4 processing tasks are to update your perception of reality as time passes, appreciate increments of change, and anticipate future resolution. If level 4 fails to accomplish these tasks, the information passing forward to level 5 will contain the perception that the painful situation is not changing, and will therefore continue indefinitely.

When level 5 is forced to work with this kind of severely distorted input, the results are poor, and usually include erroneous conclusions regarding the meaning of the experience with respect to yourself. For example, it is very difficult to correctly understand a situation, in a way that *feels* true from the inside and includes an accurate interpretation of the meaning of the experience with respect to yourself, when you do not yet have the important subjective component of being able to *feel* that you are actually a part of the experience. Without this component from level 4 processing, level 5 will conclude that you have not contributed to the problem and that there is nothing you can do to contribute to the solution.⁶³

Describing the same problem from a more subjective, experiential perspective: Careful observations from client sessions and also from my own healing journey indicate that maintaining our true hearts and finding a satisfying way to handle a situation are *necessary prerequisites* for being able to interpret the meaning of an experience in a way that is free of distortion and that *feels* true from the *inside* of the experience. It is not yet clear to me *why* this is so, but it seems to be impossible to interpret the meaning of an experience in a way that is free of distortion and that feels true from the inside without first maintaining our true hearts and finding a satisfying way to handle the situation.

You don't have adequate voluntary capacity, and therefore choose to shut things down before level 5 "interpret the meaning" processing is complete: Just as with processing at levels 3 and 4, if you have inadequate voluntary capacity, you will choose to not stay with the pain *long enough* – you will choose to shut things down before level 5 "interpret the meaning" processing has been completed. Even if you have enough level 5 skill that you would be *able* to correctly interpret the meaning of the experience, if you cannot handle the intensity and duration of the emotional pain, you will choose to shut things down before you have *time* to successfully complete this level 5 processing task. For example, the memory of a traumatic experience gets activated, but you still do not

⁶² The technical term for this component of subjective experience is *autonoetic memory*.

⁶³ When VERY well trained, level 5 can compare the distorted information from level 4 with known-to-be-true memories about the people involved and/or similar situations, and then recognize that it is receiving distorted content, but the distorted content *will still feel true and will still block successful processing*.

have adequate voluntary capacity, and therefore continue to be unable to handle the intensity and duration of the emotional pain. You therefore immediately choose to shift the focus of your conscious attention away from the traumatic memory, before you have a chance to even try to correctly interpret the meaning of the experience. As mentioned above, if the neurological mechanisms for simply choosing to shift the focus of your attention are not adequate, you can employ whatever other tools you have learned to shut the memory down and move on with life. The memory gets shut down, so that the triggered thoughts and emotions are no longer active in the present, but it remains unprocessed. It is once again stored as a traumatic memory, as opposed to being resolved, modified, and then stored as a non-traumatic memory.

You don't have adequate level 5 skills, and therefore are *unable* to correctly interpret the meaning of the experience: Just as with processing at levels 3 and 4, if you do not have adequate level 5 skills you will be *unable* to correctly interpret the meaning of the experience. For example, after the experience has occurred, "It's my fault, and therefore I'm a bad person" *feel* true, and these thoughts are accompanied by left-sided guilt and shame. Scriptural truth and logical analysis tell you that these interpretations are distorted, so you work to find a different, non-toxic way to interpret the situation. However, if you do not have the skills to correct the distorted interpretation you will eventually realize "this isn't going anywhere," and will then decide to shut down the processing attempt by moving your conscious attention onto something else. As mentioned above, this will temporarily stop the pain, but the unprocessed painful experience will then be stored as a traumatic memory.

And unless you obtain additional level 5 skills, you will go through this same process every time the memory gets activated. For example, the memory gets activated, and you stew on it for an hour, but still aren't able to correct the previous distorted interpretations. Eventually, you decide that you aren't succeeding in your attempt to resolve the problem, and then choose to shift the focus of your conscious attention away from the traumatic memory. The memory gets shut down, so that the triggered thoughts and emotions are no longer active in the present, but it remains unprocessed. It is once again stored as a traumatic memory, as opposed to being resolved, modified, and then stored as a non-traumatic memory.

You don't have adequate community: Once again, your community can provide supplementary resources. If the intensity and complexity of a painful situations exceeds your voluntary capacity and level 5 skills, *you can still complete level 5 processing if you get help from your community*. Attuned relational connection with someone who has the overall maturity to be glad to be with you in your emotional pain, and who has the capacity to *stay* with you in your pain, will augment both your involuntary and voluntary capacity regardless of what task you're facing or what situation you're in; and receiving correct interpretations and/or observation & analysis coaching will augment your level 5 *skills*. You will *not* be able to complete level 5 "interpret the meaning" processing if your voluntary capacity and level 5 skills are inadequate *and you are also without adequate augmentation from your community*.

You don't have time/emotional space to get through the processing: As discussed above in the sections on level 3, level 4, and level 5 "make sense out of it" processing,

some situations do not provide adequate time or emotional space to complete the processing tasks. This can happen both at the time of the original trauma or when the memory is activated in the future, and this lack of time/emotional space can be encountered by a surprisingly large number of people.

Immanuel thoughts with respect to level 5 interpretations: As those of you familiar with Theophostic® already know, Jesus is the most powerful and most effective source of truth when it comes to correctly interpreting the meaning of an experience, *and especially when it comes to replacing distorted, erroneous interpretations with truth.*⁶⁴ In the language of this essay, Jesus is the best possible source of augmentation for the level 5 maturity skills that enable us to correctly interpret the meaning of experiences, and especially for the maturity skills that enable us to correct previous distorted interpretations.

To the extent we are able to perceive the Lord's presence, connect with Him, and synchronize with Him, we will have the best possible level 5 skill augmentation for correctly interpreting the meaning of painful experiences and for replacing distorted, erroneous interpretations with truth.

G. Successful completion of both “make sense out of it” and “interpret the meaning” level 5 processing tasks:

*If you successfully complete these level 5 processing tasks, coherently integrating the painful experience into your worldview and into the story of your life, and correctly interpreting the meaning of the experience with respect to yourself, **the painful experience will be fully resolved. It will no longer have a negative emotional charge or contain any other toxic content.** It will be stored as a non-traumatic memory, and will contribute to knowledge, skills, empathy, wisdom, maturity, and conscious autobiographical memory for your personal history.*

H. Several additional thoughts regarding “interpret the meaning” level 5 processing tasks:

1. Level 5 distorted interpretations cause LOTS of trouble: In addition to causing negative left-sided emotions, distorted interpretations can cause trouble in many other ways as well, including interfering with each level of the processing pathway. For a detailed discussion of the many ways in which level 5 distorted interpretations can disrupt our attempts to process painful experiences, see Appendix D

2. See Theophostic® Prayer Ministry materials for additional discussion of level 5 distorted interpretations: The primary focus of Theophostic® Prayer Ministry is level 5 distorted interpretations, so if you want extensive, detailed discussion of level 5 distorted interpretations, see the many teaching materials regarding Theophostic® Prayer Ministry available from Dr. Ed Smith.

⁶⁴ Dr. Ed Smith's material regarding Theophostic® includes many, many case study examples where Jesus demonstrates His exceptional ability to replace distorted, erroneous interpretations with truth.

3. Not all erroneous interpretations hinder successful processing of painful experiences: It is interesting to note that not all distorted interpretations prevent a painful experience from being resolved. Distorted interpretations regarding the meaning of the experience *with respect to yourself* do hinder successful completion of the pain processing pathway, but our observation is that errors in model building – errors in the theoretical models that you come up with to help “make sense” out of the experience – *do not* seem to block successful processing of the painful experience. If all other processing tasks have been completed, including reconciliation of the experience with your worldview to the point that you *feel* like it all makes sense, and the only problem is that there are errors in your theoretical models, the memory will be “resolved” as far as trauma is concerned. There may be errors in the theoretical models associated with the experience, but memory for the experience will no longer be stored in a traumatic memory file, and will no longer have negative emotional charge or any other toxic content. The memory, along with its erroneous information, will be stored as an emotionally resolved, non-traumatic memory, *and the erroneous information can be corrected easily and straightforwardly at any point in the future by the simple provision of correct information.*

For example, I am constantly working on theoretical models to help us understand psychological trauma and emotional healing, and I am constantly observing my own healing journey as a source of data points. I am usually carefully observing my internal experience and the overall process, even as I am in the middle of working with a traumatic memory. Often, even during the session, observations regarding the session will lead to new thoughts regarding my theoretical models. Occasionally, these new thoughts are mistaken in some way. However, erroneous thoughts regarding my theoretical models never seem to hinder resolution of the actual traumatic memory, and the erroneous theoretical model thoughts are easily corrected as soon as I realize there is a problem and come up with a better understanding.

4. Not just about lies, not always about lies: I want to end this section with a special comment for those in the Theophostic® community: It’s not just about lies, and it’s not always about lies. Hopefully, you have already realized that this is one of the most important overall messages of this whole document regarding the pain processing pathway – that failure at *any one of the five levels* can block the processing pathway and cause a painful experience to become stuck as a traumatic experience. Distorted interpretations at level 5 are very important, and they are at least part of the problem in most traumatic memories; but they are *not* the only place problems can occur, and they are *not* the only issue that needs to be addressed in resolving traumatic experiences. In fact, incomplete processing at one of the lower levels can cause a painful experience to be carried as a traumatic memory *even though there are no distorted interpretations at level 5.*

For example, several years ago Charlotte had a series of ministry sessions that puzzled us at the time. In each of these sessions, she went to a traumatic memory, was able to perceive the Lord’s presence, experienced healing as she interacted with the Lord, and then perceived that the memory was fully resolved. And in each of these sessions, she made comments along the lines of:

“I don’t feel like the Lord spoke to any lies, but the memory feels peaceful and calm now. It feels like what the Lord did was to show me what I could do if this situation were to happen again. The reason the memory was upsetting is that I didn’t know what to do, and the reason I’ve had a lasting fear of similar situations is that I could never figure that out – if I should end up in a similar situation, I would have the same painful experience of not knowing what to do. *But I don’t feel that fear any more and the memory doesn’t feel upsetting any more because now I know how I would handle the situation.*”

We were still operating out of the traditional Theophostic® theory, and therefore believed that resolution of traumatic memories always required the resolution of trauma-associated lies, so we searched high and low. Try as we might, we could not figure out what the lies had been, and we can still remember how puzzled we were by these sessions. Now we realize that these sessions were simply examples of working with processing problems at other levels. The memories Charlotte worked with in these sessions were examples of painful experiences that had remained stuck as unresolved trauma because she was never able to complete the processing tasks at level 4, *and there were no lies*. It is very common for processing problems at lower levels to also cause distorted interpretations at level 5, but in these particular memories there were problems at level 4 *without distorted interpretations at level 5*.

V. Components necessary for healthy metabolism of painful experiences and for resolution of traumatic memories: Putting all of this together, my current formulation is that all of the following steps must be accomplished for a painful experience to be fully “metabolized” or for a traumatic memory to be resolved:

- A. Maintain organized attachment (level 1).
- B. Connect and stay connected (this requires adequate involuntary capacity at level 2, and adequate voluntary capacity at levels 3, 4, and 5).
- C. Successfully complete level 3 processing/resolve any unfinished level 3 processing tasks: re-establish and/or maintain access to your relational connection circuits, re-establish and/or maintain the presence of the relational aspects of your self, re-establish and/or maintain attuned relational connection, and re-establish and/or maintain relational connection joy.
- D. Successfully complete level 4 processing/resolve any unfinished level 4 processing tasks: maintain your true heart as the source of discernment and choices, find a satisfying way to navigate the situation.
- E. Successfully complete level 5 processing/resolve any unfinished level 5 processing tasks:
 1. Make sense out of the experience, modify your understanding of the experience and/or your worldview until they are compatible.
 2. Correctly interpret the meaning of the experience with respect to yourself, replace distorted interpretations (lies) with truth.

VI. Accomplishing these components for healing in the context of the Immanuel Approach: When people are *not* able to perceive the Lord’s presence, connect with Him, stay synchronized with Him, and receive guidance from Him, it is very helpful for me to deliberately and systematically apply these principles regarding the processing pathway as I lead these sessions. This is requiring a *lot* of study and practice to master, and a lot of effort to implement, but it is

helping to resolve some very difficult, complex situations that had been stuck prior to applying these principles.

Fortunately, for people who *are* able to perceive the Lord's presence, connect with Him, and receive help from Him, this potentially complicated process can become very simple. Repeatedly turning to the Lord and staying synchronized with the Lord can care for all of these concerns, without having to explicitly address problems with disorganized attachment, inadequate capacity, inadequate maturity skills, unfinished processing tasks, and distorted interpretations. With people who are able to perceive the Lord's presence, connect with Him deeply, and receive guidance from Him, all I do is help them perceive the Lord's presence, help them connect with the Him and synchronize with Him, help them *stay* connected to Him and *stay* synchronized with Him, coach them to keep scanning through the memory for anything that feels bad, coach them to engage with the Lord directly whenever they do find something that feels bad, and coach them to engage with the Lord directly whenever they encounter problems in the process.

I have been able to use this approach, organized around the Lord's Immanuel presence, with people who had complex, severely traumatic memories, disorganized attachment, inadequate voluntary and involuntary capacity, inadequate maturity skills, unprocessed material at multiple levels, and lies scattered everywhere. Never-the-less, even though I did not deliberately incorporate these principles in my leadership of the session, these people ended with complete resolution. Looking back on these sessions, I can see that Jesus clearly understood all these principles and concerns, and that He addressed them brilliantly.

An intermediate situation is presented by the many people who can perceive the Lord's presence, connect with Him, and receive help from Him, *but there is still enough stuff in the way that the Immanuel connection is only weak-to-moderate*. In these cases, the Lord's presence and help makes it much easier than if I had to carry the *full* responsibility for applying this material regarding the processing pathway; but the weak-to-moderate Immanuel connection impairs their ability to receive His help to the point that it is still very valuable for me to lead the session with awareness of these principles.

To summarize very briefly:

- Applying these principles deliberately and systematically can be very valuable in helping to resolve difficult, complex situations.
- *To the extent that a person is able to perceive the Lord's presence, synchronize with Him, receive help from Him, and be **with** Him*, the process can be simplified by organizing the session around the presence of Jesus and letting Him apply these principles as they are needed.

VII. Definition of type B⁶⁵ psychological trauma (non-traumatic painful experiences vs painful experiences that become trauma): Both Dr. Wilder and myself perceive that it is

⁶⁵ Type "A" trauma is the absence of good things (as when a child is neglected), whereas type "B" trauma is the presence of bad things (as when a child is physically or sexually abused). The expressions "type A traumas" and "type B traumas" come from *The Life Model: Living From the Heart Jesus Gave You*, by James Friesen, E. James Wilder, and others (Shepherd's House, Inc: Van Nuys, CA), 2000. See p.42 and following for their definitions and commentary.

especially important to formulate a definition of psychological trauma based on the model presented here due to the current problematic state of affairs regarding the definition of trauma. In the current professional literature, definitions of traumatic experience include one or more of the following components: 1.) various criteria regarding the actual event; 2.) various criteria regarding the person's emotional response to the event; and 3.) various criteria regarding the person's interpretation of the event. For example, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition (DSM IV) defines psychological trauma as an event "...in which both of the following were present: (1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others; (2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror."⁶⁶

The first component mentioned above is flawed for two reasons, since a very intensely painful event, meeting these criteria for trauma, can actually be non-traumatic if the person has especially strong capacity and skills, and is therefore able to successfully complete all processing tasks; and since a much less intense event, *not* meeting these criteria for trauma, can be traumatic if the person has low capacity and poor skills, and is therefore *not* able to successfully complete all processing tasks. The second component mentioned above is similarly flawed, since a painful event might produce intensely painful emotions, meeting this criteria for trauma, but still be non-traumatic if the person has capacity and/or skills adequate to successfully process the painful emotions; and since a painful event might produce painful emotions that are much less intense, *not* meeting this criteria for trauma, but still be traumatic if the person does *not* have capacity and/or skills adequate to successfully process the painful emotions. The third component mentioned above is valid but incomplete. Including criteria regarding the person's interpretation of the event is going in the right direction, since toxic interpretation of the meaning of the event will inherently include the problem of failed processing at level 5, but this component for defining trauma addresses only problems with processing at level 5.

From the perspective of the model presented in this essay, the best definition of trauma would address the possibility that a painful event will become traumatic if the person fails to complete processing at levels 3, 4, or 5. Therefore, we propose the following definitions of non-traumatic vs traumatic painful experiences, and our hope is that this new formulation of the definition of trauma will provide a much better foundation for all other theoretical and practical work regarding psychological trauma.

Non-traumatic painful experiences: When a painful experience is fully processed with respect to the above tasks and issues, then even though the experience is painful, you will get through it without being traumatized. After the experience is over, you will feel satisfied with how you handled the situation, you will be able to make sense out of what happened, and you will correctly interpret the meaning of the experience. When painful experiences are fully processed with respect to the above tasks and issues, they will no longer contain any toxic content or have any toxic power. When painful experiences have been emotionally and cognitively "metabolized" in this way, they will be stored as non-traumatic memories, and will contribute to knowledge, skills, empathy, wisdom, maturity, and conscious autobiographical memory for our personal history. And when these memories are activated at

⁶⁶ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth edition (DSM IV): (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press), 1994, pages 427&8.

any point in the future, they contribute valuable resources as opposed to interfering with our ability to function.

Traumatic painful experiences: Therefore, *our definition of type B psychological trauma is a painful experience that has **not** been fully processed*, and each unfinished processing task results in corresponding toxic content that will be carried as part of the experience as long as the task remains unresolved.⁶⁷ Furthermore, if the person does not get help to finish processing the trauma at the time it occurs, the experience will be *stored* in this unprocessed state, and becomes a *traumatic memory*. When these memories are activated at any point in the future, the unresolved toxic content will come forward with power to disrupt our lives.

Supporting evidence: If this paradigm is accurate and this definition of trauma is valid, what kind of supporting evidence would we expect to find as we examine real life experience?

- We would expect to find that people with especially strong capacity, maturity skills, and community support are able to survive intensely painful experiences *without* developing pathological stress reactions. And this is exactly what we do find. Some of the most dramatic data points along these lines are provided by studies showing that many political prisoners and prisoners of war, *even including those who survived prolonged imprisonment and repeated torture*, have *not* developed PTSD. For example, a study of 70 former naval aviator POWs, with an average of five years of imprisonment during which they had been repeatedly tortured, found that only 14% developed “adjustment reactions,” and only a third of these adjustment reactions were full blown PTSD.⁶⁸ Several studies working with 55 tortured political prisoners in Turkey came up with similar results. Even though these people had survived an average of four years of imprisonment and an *average* of **291** exposures to torture, only 33% had developed PTSD.

Providing especially clear support for our formulation with respect to trauma, these studies explicitly document both strong psychological preparedness and strong family/community support, and discuss how these factors may have contributed to the surprisingly low incidence of PTSD in light of the severity of the torture.⁶⁹ Jesus provides another powerful data point, in that He displays no trauma-related psychopathology, even though He was tortured to death on a cross.

- We would expect to find that the likelihood of developing problematic symptoms after painful events increases steadily as the magnitude of the painful experiences increase. And this is exactly

⁶⁷ The distorted interpretations, or *lies*, associated with unresolved traumatic events are one of the best examples of toxic content corresponding to an unresolved processing task.

⁶⁸ Nice, D.S., Garland, C.F., Hilton, S.M., Baggett, J.C., & Mitchell, R.E., “Long-term health outcomes and medical effects of torture among US Navy prisoners of war in Vietnam.” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1996, Vol. 276, pages 375-381.

⁶⁹ Basoglu, Metin, “Severity of trauma as predictor of long-term psychological status in survivors of torture,” *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*. 1995, Vol. 9, No. 4, pages 339-350; Basoglu, Metin; Paker, Murat; Aker, T; Livanou, M.; and Gok, S. “Psychological preparedness for trauma as a protective factor in survivors of torture.” *Psychological Medicine*, 1997, Vol. 27, pages 1421-1433; and Basoglu, Metin; Paker, Murat; Paker, Ozgun; Ozmen, Erdogan; Marks, Isaac; Incesu, Cem; Sahim, Dogan; and Sarimurat, Nusin, “Psychological effects of torture: A comparison of tortured with nontortured political activists in Turkey.” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, January 1994, Vol. 151, No. 1, pages 76-81.

what we do find. For example, a study with World War II combat veterans found that the percentage of soldiers with acute stress reaction increased steadily as the total cumulative combat exposure increased, eventually reaching almost 100% by the time the soldiers had been exposed to sixty days of continuous combat;⁷⁰ and a number of studies with Viet Nam veterans have found that the *likelihood* of developing PTSD is strongly correlated to cumulative combat exposure.⁷¹ A closely related point is that we would expect to find that the *severity* of problematic symptoms after painful events increases as the magnitude of the painful experiences increase. And this is exactly what we do find. For example, studies with Vietnam veterans have found that the amount and intensity of combat exposure is strongly correlated with both the severity of adjustment problems following military service and the severity of PTSD.⁷²

- We would expect to find that when people go through painful experiences, poor community support (minimal augmentation for capacity and maturity skills) would result in more severe symptoms of psychological trauma. And this is exactly what we do find. For example, Dr. Terr studied a group of children who all went through the same ordeal of being kidnaped and buried in an underground prison for several days, and she found that the children with poor family support and weak community bonding demonstrated symptoms that were much more severe than children with strong family support and good community bonding.⁷³ There are also a number of other studies with similar results.⁷⁴

- We would expect to find that people with pre-existing psychological and social impairments are much more likely to develop pathological reactions in response to painful experiences. And this is exactly what we do find. For example, one study with World War II veterans found that during their time in the military, soldiers with pre-service personality disorders were *eight times* (yes, that's **800%**) more likely to have "breakdowns" resulting in psychiatric hospitalizations, and that soldiers with even mild impairment in pre-service psychological functioning were *six times* (yes, that's **600%**) more likely to have "breakdowns" requiring psychiatric hospitalizations. At the

⁷⁰ Swank, Roy L., & Marchand, Walter E., "Combat neuroses: Development of combat exhaustion." *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1946, Vol. 55, Pages 236-247. On page 243, the authors explicitly comment: "...Practically all infantry soldiers suffer from a neurotic reaction eventually if they are subjected to the stress of modern combat continuously and long enough."

⁷¹ See, for example, the literature review included in Foy, David W., Carroll, Edward M., and Donahoe, Clyde P., "Etiological factors in the development of PTSD in clinical samples of Vietnam combat veterans," *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, January 1987, Vol. 43, No. 1, pages 17-27.

⁷² See, for example, Foy, David W., Sippelle, R. Carl, Rueger, Drue Barrett, and Carroll, Edward M., "Etiology of posttraumatic stress disorder in Vietnam veterans: Analysis of pre-military, military, and combat exposure influences." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1984, Vol. 52, No. 1, pages 78-87; and Strayer, Richard, & Ellenhorn, Lewis, "Vietnam veterans: A study exploring adjustment patterns and attitudes." *Journal of Social Issues*. 1975, Vol. 31, No. 4, pages 81-94.

⁷³ Terr, Lenore C., "Chowchilla revisited: The effects of psychic trauma four years after a school-bus kidnapping." *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, December 1983, Vol. 140, No. 12, pages 1543-1550.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Madakasira, Sudhakar, & O'Brian, Kevin, "Acute posttraumatic stress disorder in victims of a natural disaster," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*. May 1987, Vol. 175, No. 5., pages 286-290; and Bonanno, George A., Galea, Sandro, Bucciarelli, Angela, Vlahov, David, "What predicts psychological resilience after disaster? The role of demographics, resources, and life stress." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 2007, Vol. 75, No. 5, pages 671-682.

time of follow-up interviews three to nine years after discharge, soldiers with pre-service personality disorders were *six times* (again, that's **600%**) more likely to have moderate-to-severe psychiatric disability, and soldiers with even mild psychological impairment before entering the military were three times (**300%**) more likely to have moderate-to-severe psychiatric disability. Furthermore, soldiers with pre-service personality disorders were twice as likely to breakdown after only mild-to-moderate combat, whereas soldiers with "normal" personalities rarely suffered breakdowns unless they had survived severe combat exposure.⁷⁵ Similarly, several studies with Viet Nam veterans have found that pre-service psychological and social impairment strongly predicted increased difficulties with adjusting to civilian life after completion of military service.⁷⁶

- We would expect to find that some people do not require overwhelmingly painful experiences to become psychologically traumatized. Once again, this is exactly what we do find. For example, several studies have found that people in the general population (as opposed to combat veterans, political prisoners, survivors of natural disasters, etc) can develop all of the signs and symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder in response to events that most would consider to be only moderately painful.⁷⁷

- And finally, we would expect to find that symptoms associated with traumatic memories can be resolved by helping the person access the memories and successfully complete the processing tasks. And this is exactly what we do find. For example, case studies with EMDR,⁷⁸ case studies with Theophostic®,⁷⁹ case studies with the Immanuel approach,⁸⁰ and case studies with a number

⁷⁵ Brill, Norman Q., and Beebe, Gilbert W., *A follow-up study of war neuroses*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 1955.

⁷⁶ Nace, Edgar P., O'Brien, Charles P., Mintz, James, Ream, Norman, and Meyers, Andrew L., "Adjustment among Vietnam veteran drug users two years post service," pages 71-128 in: Figley, Charles R, ed. *Stress Disorders Among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research, and Treatment*. (New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel), 1978; Robins, L.N., *Veteran's Drug Use Three Years After Vietnam*. (St. Louise, MO: Department of Psychiatry, Washington University School of Medicine), 1974; and Worthington, E.R., "Demographic and preservice variables as predictors of postmilitary service adjustment." Pages 173-187 in: Figley, Charles R, ed. *Stress Disorders Among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research, and Treatment*. (New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel), 1978.

⁷⁷ See, for example: Helzer, John E., Robins, Lee N., & McEvoy, Larry, "Post-traumatic stress disorder in the general population: Findings of the epidemiologic catchment area survey." *New England Journal of Medicine*, December 24 1987, Vol. 317, No. 26, pages 1630-1634; Mol, Saskia S.L., Arntz, Arnoud, Metsemakers, Job F.M., Dinant, Geert-Jan, Vilters-Van Monfort, Pauline A.P., & Knottnerus, J. Andre, "Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder after non-traumatic events: evidence from an open population study." *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2005, Vol. 186, pages 494-499; and Bodkin, Alexander J., Pope, Harrison G., Detke, Michael J., & Hudson, James I., "Is PTSD caused by traumatic stress?" *The Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 2007, Vol. 21, pages 176-82.

⁷⁸ See, for example, the many case studies described in Shapiro, Francine. *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing: Basic Principles, Protocols, and Procedures*. (New York, NY: Guilford Press) 1995; and Shapiro, Francine & Silk Forrest, Margot. *EMDR: The Breakthrough Therapy for Overcoming Anxiety, Stress, and Trauma* (HarperCollins: New York, NY), 1997.

⁷⁹ See, for example, the many case studies describe in Smith, Ed. *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts*. (Co-published: Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, Campbellsville, KY: New Creation) 2002; and Smith, Ed. *Theophostic® Prayer Ministry: Basic Seminar Manual*, (Campbellsville, KY: New Creation Publishing),

of other approaches to emotional healing all describe symptoms that had initially been resistant to change, subsequent discovery of underlying traumatic memories that clearly matched the symptoms, and then lasting resolution of the presenting problems as the person worked through the trauma to complete previously unfinished processing tasks.

VIII. Full resolution of pain (from distressing emotions to feeling joyful): In some situations, a person encounters a source of distress that is very brief, so that the source of distress has already been resolved by the time he has completed the level 3 processing task of maintaining/re-establishing access to his relational connection circuits, the relational aspect of his self, attuned relational connection, and relational connection joy. For example, an infant might be frightened by a loud noise and start crying, and the loud noise is long gone by the time his mother has attuned to him and helped him re-establish relational connection joy. Furthermore, the source of distress was simple and minor, so that processing at levels 4 and 5 are straightforward and go quickly. In this kind of situation, maintaining/re-establishing joy, completing the rest of the processing journey (processing tasks at levels 4 and 5), resolving external sources of distress, and calming negative emotions/getting back to feeling joyful all blend together smoothly over a short period of time. However, many situations are more complicated, with processing at levels 4 and 5 that is slow and difficult, and external sources of distress that are *not* quickly resolved. In these situations it is helpful to recognize that maintaining/re-establishing joy, completing the rest of the processing journey, resolving external sources of distress, and calming negative emotions/getting back to feeling joyful are four different steps along the trail to fully resolving the painful experience.

Maintaining/re-establishing joy (level 3): As described above, the level 3 processing task of maintaining/re-establishing relational connection joy is one of the most important tasks that must be accomplished as you journey through the pain processing pathway. It is important to remember that maintaining/regaining access to your relational connection circuits, maintaining/recovering the relational aspect of your self, maintaining/re-establishing attuned relational connection, and maintaining/re-establishing relational connection joy is a necessary foundation for successful processing at levels 4 and 5. However, it is also important to remember that you can maintain/re-establish relational connection joy *even if you are not able to complete the rest of the processing journey, and even if the external sources of distress are not resolved and you continue to feel painful emotions.* To put this another way, successful completion of the rest of the processing pathway, resolution of external sources of distress, and getting back to feeling joyful are *not necessary requirements* for staying relational and maintaining relational connection joy.

Note for those using THRIVE training material: When THRIVE training material refers to “recovery” in dealing with traumatic experiences or traumatic memories, it is referring to the step of regaining access to your relational connection circuits, *recovering the relational aspect of yourself*, re-establishing attuned relational connection, and returning to relational connection joy. In the THRIVE material, “recovery from trauma” is the same thing as

2005. See also the sessions portrayed in Dr. Smiths live ministry session DVDs (Smith, Edward M., *Theophostic® Prayer Ministry: Ministry Demonstration Training*, (Campbellsville, KY: New Creation Publishing) 2006.

⁸⁰ See, for example, the many case studies described on the “Examples of Healing” page of our website (www.kclehman.com), and the many sessions portrayed in our live demonstration DVDs.

successfully completing level 3 processing tasks. It is especially important to remember this when trying to integrate THRIVE material with other teaching on emotional healing, since many think of “recovery from trauma” as being the *whole process of resolution*, including re-establishing relational connection joy, *and also* successful completion of the rest of the processing journey, resolution of external sources of distress, and then finally calming from the negative emotions/getting back to the place of actually feeling *joyful* (shalom and joy). When these two very different ways of understanding “recovery” from trauma are accidentally used interchangeably, much confusion ensues.

Successful completion of remaining processing tasks (levels 4 and 5): For the person to be able to calm down, resolve negative emotions, and get back to the place of feeling *joyful*, both *internal* and *external* sources of distress must be resolved. When dealing with traumatic memories, unfinished level 4 tasks can be contributing unpleasant feelings of inadequacy, and unfinished level 5 tasks can be contributing unpleasant feelings of confusion and painful left-sided negative emotions *even though you have already re-established attuned relational connection and relational connection joy*. *Internal* sources of distress will not be fully resolved until level 4 inadequacy issues have been resolved, level 5 confusion issues have been resolved, and level 5 distorted interpretations have been resolved.

Note again that successful completion of the processing pathway, which resolves *internal* sources of distress, also resolves the painful experience to the point that it will not be traumatic.

Note also that resolution of *external* sources of distress and getting back to shalom and joy (feeling *joyful*) are *not necessary requirements* for successfully completing your journey through the processing pathway. For example, if your spouse dies, you can successfully process the painful experience, so that it does not contain any traumatic toxic content and will not be stored as a traumatic memory, but still be feeling painful sadness because you have not completed the healthy grieving process (the *external* source of distress has not yet been resolved).

Resolution of *external* sources of distress: To get to the place where you can calm down, resolve negative emotions, and get back to feeling *joyful*, *external* sources of distress must also be resolved. For example, let’s say you’re hiking in the woods with your eight year old daughter, it’s getting dark, and you’re still a quarter mile from your cabin. You begin to hear noises on the trail behind you, and feel increasing fear as they get progressively louder and closer. In this example you have a foundation of healthy attachment, high capacity, and strong maturity skills, so you maintain organized attachment, you stay connected to the situation, you maintain access to your relational connection circuits and maintain the relational aspects of yourself, and you maintain your true heart as the source of your discernment and decisions, so that you’re able to handle the situation in a way that feels satisfying. Therefore, instead of becoming totally desynchronized and non-relational, and abandoning your daughter as you race desperately for the cabin, you pick up a large stick, tell your daughter to get behind you, ask the Lord for protection, and turn to face the approaching danger.

A large dog eventually comes out of the woods, and you realize by its strange behavior and foaming mouth that it has rabies. It lunges at you, but you’re able to fend it off with the stick,

and it backs off after several failed attempts. You tell your daughter to stay behind you, and you continue asking the Lord for protection as you begin backing down the trail towards your cabin, keeping the stick between you and the dog. Again, you have a foundation of healthy attachment, so you maintain organized attachment at level 1; you have high involuntary capacity, so you stay connected at level 2; you have high voluntary capacity, so you stay connected at levels 3, 4, and 5; you have strong level 3 skills, so you stay relational with your daughter and the Lord, even as you're experiencing intense fear; you have strong level 4 skills, so you prioritize your daughter's safety above your own, you make good decisions regarding how to protect yourself from the dog, and you feel satisfied with how you're handling the situation; and you have strong level 5 skills, so you are able to make sense out of the situation⁸¹ and you do not draw distorted interpretations regarding its meaning with respect to yourself.⁸²

However, even though you are successfully completing the processing tasks at all five levels, and are therefore not being traumatized by the experience, *you will not calm down, resolve the negative emotion of fear, and get back to feeling joyful until you have gotten back to the protection of your cabin.*

Calming negative emotions/Feeling joyful (joy + shalom): With relational connection joy in place (maintained or re-established), processing tasks at levels 4 and 5 completed, and external sources of distress resolved, as level 4 circuits calm the negative emotions *you will move from the subjective experience of feeling joy in conjunction with negative emotions that are simultaneously present to the subjective experience of feeling joy without simultaneous negative emotions.* Returning to feeling good – returning to *shalom* and joy – returning to feeling joyful only occurs *after* you have maintained/re-established relational connection joy, completed your journey through the rest of the processing pathway, and resolved external sources of distress. Then, *as your level 4 circuits complete the last step of calming the negative emotions, you will simultaneously return to the subjective experience of feeling joyful.*

In many situations understanding this larger picture with respect to resolving painful experiences is not necessary. For example, the four steps just discussed usually blend together quickly and smoothly in the simple, mild intensity painful experiences we encounter each day, such as the scenarios described in the extended example section below. We can also navigate many emotional healing sessions without the need to understand this larger picture with respect to resolving painful experiences. For most mild to moderate traumatic memories, level 3 processing has been successfully completed at the time of the original experience, and *external* sources of distress have been resolved by the time the person is attempting to work with the memories. In emotional healing sessions dealing with this kind of traumatic memory, the only work remaining is to resolve internal sources of distress being caused by unfinished tasks at levels 4 and 5. In these sessions, the person receiving ministry quickly returns to *shalom* and joy as soon as the

⁸¹ For example, you realize that the whole situation is basically understandable, and don't get disoriented by thoughts such as "How can this be happening to me? The authorities shouldn't allow rabid dogs in our civilized camping area!...etc."

⁸² For example, instead of coming to distorted conclusions, such as "The Lord isn't with me and/or doesn't love me, since He is allowing this terrible thing to happen," you hold onto the truth the Lord is with you and that He is good, even when He allows bad things to happen.

unfinished tasks at levels 4 and 5 have been taken care of, and the whole process seems fairly straight-forward. These are the sessions where basic Theophostic®-based ministry works well, and the person gets to the place of feeling “peaceful and calm” by the end of the session. You can facilitate many of these sessions and never run into trouble for lack of knowing about the larger picture with respect to resolving painful experiences.

However, it is sometimes important to understand this larger picture *because the four different pieces discussed above can become tangibly separated in the process of working with traumatic memories*. For example, for more severe traumatic memories level 3 processing is often *not* completed at the time of the original experience, and the memories are therefore stored without access to the relational connection circuits and without relational connection joy. In addition to the more common internal sources of distress from unfinished tasks at levels 4 and 5, these memories will also contain unfinished level 3 tasks as an additional internal source of distress. In sessions working with this kind of memory, successfully completing level 3 processing (re-establishing attuned relational connection and relational connection joy) may occur early in the process, and the person will usually perceive some benefit when this occurs. However, re-establishing relational connection joy will *not* immediately result in the traumatic memory being completely resolved and the person feeling *joyful* because unfinished tasks at levels 4 and 5 still remain as internal sources of distress. Returning to relational connection joy establishes a necessary foundation, but the traumatic memory is not *fully* resolved, and the person does not return to *shalom* and joy, until these remaining processing tasks are completed. In some cases, resolving internal distress from unfinished level 3 processing and resolving internal distress from unfinished processing tasks at levels 4 and 5 may even happen in separate sessions. In these cases it is helpful to understand the larger picture so that you will recognize the value of sessions where you “just” re-establish relational connection joy, but do not get all the way to feeling *joyful* (*shalom* and joy). Understanding the larger picture can also help to avoid deciding to stop after the initial step of re-establishing relational connection joy, but before resolving unfinished tasks at levels 4 and 5 (“I feel better – maybe we’re finished”).

In other cases, external sources of distress have not yet been resolved. If the traumatic memory was stored with unfinished processing tasks at level 3, the person will perceive benefit as he recovers the relational aspect of his being and re-establishes relational connection joy. And he will perceive benefit when processing tasks at levels 4 and 5 are accomplished, so that additional sources of internal distress are resolved. However, negative emotions will not fully resolve and the person will not return to *shalom* and joy because truth-based, external sources of distress still remain. In these cases it is helpful to understand the larger picture with respect to resolving painful experiences so that you will recognize that the traumatic memories have been resolved, and not dismiss the healing just because the person is still in distress.

To some extent, it is always better to have a more accurate understanding regarding how things work. The more accurately we understand the process, the less likely we are to get tangled up in various forms of confusion and misunderstanding.

IX. Attachment pain: Attachment pain requires additional discussion because there are important differences between attachment pain and all other distressing emotional experiences:

If you encounter a painful situation and fail to successfully complete processing at level 3, you will have the level 3 distressing emotional experience of losing access to your relational

connection circuits. Fortunately, the Lord has provided a plan for resolving this problem that is available to anybody with adequate resources for building/augmenting her capacity and level 3 skills. For example, if someone with adequate capacity and maturity joins you in the situation and attunes to you, your level 3 circuits will respond to their attunement and thereby re-establish access to your relational connection circuits.

If you fail to successfully complete processing at level 4, you will have the level 4 distressing emotional experience of feeling inadequate and of being unsatisfied with the way you handled the painful situation in question. Fortunately, the Lord has provided a plan for resolving this problem that is available to anybody with adequate resources for building/augmenting her capacity and level 4 skills. For example, if your capacity grows over time and you build your level 4 skills by observing others who model better ways to handle the situation, you can return to the memory of the traumatic experience and resolve the unfinished level 4 tasks.

If you fail to successfully complete processing at level 5, you will have the level 5 distressing emotional experience of feeling confused, and/or the level 5 distressing experience of distorted interpretations and the associated negative left-sided emotions. Fortunately, the Lord has provided a plan for resolving this problem that is available to anybody with adequate resources for building/augmenting her capacity and level 5 skills. For example, if your capacity grows over time and you build your level 5 skills by hearing good explanations and correct interpretations, you can return to the traumatic memory and resolve the unfinished level 5 tasks.

If you encounter a painful situation that prompts one or more of the negative right-sided emotions, you will have the distressing emotional experience of feeling some combination of sadness, anger, right-sided hopeless despair, right-sided shame, fear, and disgust. Fortunately, the Lord has provided a plan for resolving this problem that is available to anybody with adequate capacity and maturity skills. As described above, after you have successfully completed your journey through the pain processing pathway, and after you have resolved the external sources of distress, circuits in your level 4 right-prefrontal cortex will calm your brain and resolve the negative right-sided emotions.

In contrast to each of these other distressing emotional experiences, there does not seem to be such a straight-forward plan for getting back to full resolution from attachment pain. The attachment component of our brain/mind/spirit system seems to be designed so that no other person can fill the hole left by the absence of someone you needed in childhood or the loss of someone you are deeply bonded to. Another way to say this is that your level 1 “accepts no substitutes” with respect to key attachment figures. This “accepts no substitutes” phenomena is particularly easy to see with infants/very young children, who will refuse to be comforted by anyone else when they need one of their primary attachment figures. When you experience attachment pain due to separation from someone you are deeply bonded to, you can successfully process the pain so that it does not become traumatic, but the brain does *not* seem to have circuits for getting back to full resolution from attachment pain *except by reconnecting with the person who’s absence is causing the pain.*

Temporary attachment pain: Temporary attachment pain is much like any other pain where the *external* source of distress is not *quickly* resolved, but does *eventually* resolve. The distressing experience of feeling attachment pain goes through the pain processing pathway, with level one needing to maintain organized attachment, level two needing to maintain connection, level three

needing to maintain access to the relational connection circuits, level four needing to find a satisfying way to navigate the situation, and level five needing to make sense out of the situation and correctly interpret the meaning with respect to yourself. If these tasks are successfully completed, the experience will be painful but not traumatic, and memory for the experience will be stored as non-traumatic memory. Then, just as with other painful experiences in which the *external* source of distress does *not* resolve quickly, the attachment pain will continue as long as the external source of distress is still present,⁸³ and you will not return to shalom and joy until the external source of distress is resolved.⁸⁴

The phenomena of hunger provides a useful analogy in helping us to understand the differences between attachment pain and the other distressing emotional experiences. With the other distressing emotional experiences, level four circuits quiet and resolves the distressing emotion once the painful experience has been successfully processed and the external source of distress has been removed. In contrast, level four is *not* needed for the resolution of hunger. With hunger, you continue to feel hungry as long as you continue without food, but the distressing subjective experience of hunger resolves as you eat, without any need for level four to calm it. With respect to this qualitative trait, attachment pain appears to be like hunger. Your attachment pain continues as long as you are separated from important attachment figures, but the distressing subjective experience of attachment pain resolves when you reconnect, without any need for level four to calm it.

Psychiatric consultation assignments where I have been out of town and separated from Charlotte for two or three weeks provide a good example. During the time I am away from Charlotte, I experience mild to moderate background attachment pain. Throughout each day that I am away, my pain processing pathway successfully completes the necessary tasks so that this attachment pain does not become traumatic and get stored as traumatic memories, but I do not return to feeling *joyful* (shalom and joy) because the external source of distress (being separated from Charlotte) remains. I do not return to shalom and joy until I reconnect with Charlotte; and when I do reconnect with Charlotte, my attachment pain resolves promptly and spontaneously, without needing level four to quiet the source of the pain.

Attachment pain from “permanent” losses: Attachment pain from “permanent” losses, such as the irreversible absence of needed attachment in childhood, or the death of a close friend or family member, present an especially unique situation. Just as with temporary attachment pain, this kind of attachment pain can be processed through the pain processing pathway, so that it does not become a traumatic experience. However, since the attachment component of our brain/mind/spirit system seems to be designed so that no other person can fill the hole left by the absence of someone you needed in childhood or the loss of someone to whom you are deeply bonded, *the external source of distress can continue indefinitely*. These observations regarding attachment have led most attachment theorists to conclude that these kinds of attachment wounds can *never* be resolved.

⁸³ “As long as the external source of distress is still present” = “As long as you are still separated from the person you are deeply bonded to.”

⁸⁴ “Until the external source of distress is resolved” = “until you reconnect with the person who’s absence is causing the pain.”

Fortunately, the Lord seems to have provided *one very important exception* to the “level 1 accepts no substitutes” rule.

****Fill in description of session where the person was able to heal a “permanent” attachment wound by accepting Jesus in place of her primary attachment figure, and also the explanation she gave: “The love I got from Grandma is Jesus’ love. Everything good in Grandma that I bonded to was coming from Jesus, but just passing through her. Jesus is not supplying an acceptable substitute, He is supplying the same active ingredient – He is actually supplying exactly what I was bonded to all along. Before, it was coming through GM, and now the same love is coming directly from Jesus.”**

This session was actually a bit humorous because I kept trying to explain to her why it’s not possible to heal “permanent” attachment wounds just as she kept trying to explain to me why Jesus is the one exception. I was so stuck in the accepted wisdom that she had to explain this five or six times before I was able to understand what she was saying. After this repeated explanation *finally* sunk in, I realized that we have seen many sessions in which Jesus has healed attachment pain from the loss of close family and/or friends. Some of the best examples have been our sessions with Chrystal, where Jesus appears to have healed the “permanent” attachment pain from the death of her father (some of this can be observed in the live session DVD “*Chrystal: Loss of Father Before Birth, Session #1*, and the Lord completed the process in the course of several additional sessions).

Furthermore, once I understood this principle regarding how Jesus could fill the hole left by the loss of a close family member or friend, I realized that the same principle could apply to absence wounds where the person had not received needed attachment/bonding during her childhood, and I realized that we had also seen many examples of this. For example, at one point in the *Rocky: Father-Son Wounds* live session DVD, Rocky reports that the Lord is filling “this deep empty place” where more healthy bonding to his father should have been.

Attachment pain from lack of adequate healthy attachments in the present: Observations regarding attachment and attachment pain seem to indicate that we have been designed to need healthy attachments to God and other people. If you do *not* have adequate healthy, bonded relationships you will have attachment pain, and this kind of attachment pain can only be resolved by building adequate attachments in the present. Hunger again provides an excellent analogy. You do not “heal” hunger by administering medication, psychotherapy, or prayer ministry. You resolve hunger by providing adequate food. Similarly, you do not “heal” attachment pain from lack of adequate relational bonds, but rather resolve this kind of attachment pain by building adequate attachments in the present.

X. Expanded examples: So what does it look like, in real life, when a person puts all of these pieces together? What does it look like to encounter a non-painful experience? What does it look like to encounter a painful experience and be able to smoothly and successfully travel through the processing pathway, so that the experience is fully resolved and stored as a non-traumatic memory? What does it look like when we encounter a painful experience that we are not able to successfully process, and that we therefore shutdown and store as a traumatic memory? What does it look like when we get triggered, but then we are able to recognize the triggering, work with the underlying traumatic memory, and complete the journey through the processing

pathway, so that the traumatic memory is resolved, and then stored in its new, resolved, modified form as a non-traumatic memory?

Non-painful experiences: Although this essay focuses on how we process painful experiences, the processing pathway discussed here is actually the processing pathway for all experiences. Waves of new information from non-painful experiences travel along the same pathway through the five levels of the social/emotional processing system, and the same processing tasks must be completed. It's just that when you're dealing with a non-painful experience, the journey is so straightforward and the processing tasks are completed so easily that you don't notice any of it.

****Example pending****

Painful experiences, with optimal scenario of moving through the pathway smoothly and successfully: Let's say I'm out early, walking through the woods in the spring, enjoying the wildflowers and the migrating song birds. Even though my parents are in Kansas, Charlotte is at home in bed, and the Lord is not visible, my level 1 attachment circuits and level 3 relational connection circuits are maintaining a baseline of quiet joy because I have internalized these relationships, and know that the important people in my life love me and are glad to be with me, even though I can't see their smiling, "I'm glad to be with you" faces in front of me at the moment. My baseline of quiet joy will be particularly strong if I am practicing Immanuel exercises, where I am able to perceive a subtle mental image of the Lord's smiling face and have a subtle sense that He's glad to be with me, and where I talk with Him very conversationally about the things I am seeing and enjoying.

As I am walking along, a wave of right-sided disgust washes through me as I encounter a dead rabbit lying in the middle of the trail, and I grimace and mutter 'yuck' to myself as I both see and smell the carcass that was partially eaten and then left to rot. I also feel left-sided cognition-based sadness as I think about how frightened this small creature must have been as it was captured and killed. I do *not* disconnect from the disgust and sadness, or push the unpleasant stimuli and distressing emotions away by intensely focusing on something else, but rather stay fully connected to my experience in the present. I also do *not* lose my connection with the Lord, or the sense that He's glad to be with me; but the subjective experience is not the same, as the joy from this attuned relational connection is now sharing space in my conscious awareness with disgust and sadness. I continue to feel the combination of disgust, sadness, and relational connection joy as I find a stick and move the dead body off the trail, as a courtesy to other hikers. This is definitely an unpleasant task, but it feels satisfying to clean up the mess, and to know that others will have a more pleasant morning because I took care of it.

After tossing the last pieces of rabbit carcass into the woods, I stand there for a few minutes as I continue to process this unpleasant bump in my otherwise enjoyable morning. I make a few comments to the Lord about how disgusting it was – it feels good to acknowledge my disgust and to share it with someone. I also acknowledge my sadness and share that with the Lord as well. As I think briefly about finding the dead rabbit, I realize that I wish my otherwise enjoyable early morning nature hike would not be disturbed by unpleasant surprises, but that, unfortunately, disgust and sadness are all part of living in this fallen and sinful world, and I tell the Lord that I am sure looking forward to living in His new creation some day. An especially important aspect of my level 5 processing is that I *do not* come up with distorted interpretations regarding the

meaning with respect to myself, such as: “If the Lord lets this innocent little rabbit be killed and mangled, He must not really care about His creatures – I can’t trust Him to care for me either.”

And then I go on with my hike. Over the next minute or two my feelings of disgust and sadness gradually resolve as I calm down, and my subtle mental image of the Lord’s smiling face and the sense that He’s glad to be with me no longer have to share space in my conscious awareness with these negative emotions. I return to my original baseline of feeling *joyful* (joy without simultaneous negative emotions), and I resume my conversation with the Lord about the flowers and birds that I’m appreciating.

Fifteen minutes later, I feel a flash of anger and a wave of sadness as I find discarded packaging from a “Happy Meal” beside the trail, covering a particularly beautiful cluster of violets – anger towards the careless hikers who thoughtlessly tossed their garbage into the woods, and sadness regarding the ways in which humankind routinely defaces the natural world. I do *not* disconnect from the disgust and sadness, or push the unpleasant stimuli and distressing emotions away by intensely focusing on something else, but rather stay fully connected to my experience in the present. I also do *not* lose my connection with the Lord, or the sense that He’s glad to be with me; but the subjective experience is much different, now that the joy from this attuned relational connection is sharing space in my conscious awareness with anger and sadness. I continue to feel the combination of anger, sadness, and joy as I pick up the litter and put it into my pack, and then I go on with my hike as I continue to process the experience. As part of my processing I talk to the Lord about how unhappy I am with how much brokenness and sin He allows. I mentally review the many conversations I have already had with the Lord regarding this subject, and I remind the Lord that this is just one small sample of the many evils in the world that trouble me. I also think about the many data points regarding His faithfulness, and the data points that indicate He is caring for a bigger picture with respect to real relationships requiring free will, etc.. Eventually, I come to the same place I have come to many times in the past: “I can’t fully understand why Jesus and the Father allow people to cause so much destruction to His creation and to each other, but He is with me, and because of who He is, that is enough.” I feel like I can trust His character and heart, and that I can accept His decisions regarding what He allows in the world. Again, an especially important part of my level 5 processing is that I *do not* come up with distorted conclusions, such as: “It’s hopeless. No matter where I go or what I’m doing, some immature, inconsiderate, selfish person will ruin it for me. I should just learn to never expect to really enjoy anything.”

After settling these issues, I begin to calm down, and within several minutes I no longer feel anger or sadness. As the anger and sadness resolve, and my subtle mental image of the Lord’s smiling face and the sense that He’s glad to be with me no longer have to share space with negative emotions, I resume my conversation with the Lord about the wildlife I’m appreciating and return to my original baseline of feeling *joyful*.

Twenty minutes later, I come around a large rock formation and startle a deer grazing only a few feet from the trail. As the deer starts, with a loud alarm snort, and crashes into the bushes, I am equally startled, and feel an intense surge of “fight or flight” right-sided fear. Again, I do *not* disconnect from the fear, but rather stay fully connected to my experience in the present; and I do *not* lose my connection with the Lord, or the sense that He is glad to be with me. I feel both the acute fear and my baseline relational connection joy, and the subjective experience of the fear and joy together is of course much different than my original baseline of quiet joy.

I quickly realize that the large object that has just startled me is only a deer, and then go on with my hike as I continue to process the experience. I feel a bit embarrassed at having been so frightened by a deer, but then I decide that anybody would have been frightened by being startled like that. Again, an especially important part of my level 5 processing is that I *do not* come up with distorted interpretations, such as: “I’m really a pathetic weakling and an idiot for being afraid of a deer,” or “It’s totally unacceptable that some stupid animal can scare me – I should not have to be vulnerable to being frightened in this way. I need to get myself a gun so that I won’t have to be afraid of anything. Then if a stupid animal startles me – I’ll blow it’s head off!”

After settling the issue of whether or not I am a weakling and/or an idiot, I begin to calm down, and within in a minute or two I no longer feel fear. As the fear resolves, and my subtle mental image of the Lord’s smiling face and the sense that He’s glad to be with me no longer have to share space with this negative emotion, I resume my conversation with the Lord about the wildlife I’m appreciating and return to my original baseline of feeling *joyful*.

In each of these brief encounters with some unpleasant aspect of reality, my level 1 attachment circuits maintained organized attachment, even though I was not consciously aware of their activity and the importance of organized attachment never crossed my mind. My level 2 neurological circuits assessed each situation, decided that they did not exceeded my involuntary capacity, and allowed me to hold the experiences in my normal conscious awareness and maintain emotional connection, even though I did not consciously perceive the activity of these circuits or pause even for a moment to consider whether or not I was dissociating. My level 3 neurological circuits maintained my attuned relational connection with the Lord, and my level 1 circuits maintained the consequent relational connection joy, *even during the times I was also experiencing distressing emotions*, and once again I was not consciously aware of these neurological activities. My level 3 circuits also maintained my attention on the unpleasant stimuli and distressing emotions, instead of pushing these unpleasant realities away by focusing my attention elsewhere; but in these experiences that were only mildly painful and where the processing tasks flowed so smoothly and easily, I chose to stay with the pain processing journey with only the slightest awareness that I was making this choice.

In each of these brief encounters with some unpleasant aspect of reality, I was able to successfully complete the level 4 processing tasks of navigating the situation in a way that felt satisfying. On the periphery of my consciousness, I was aware of making choices regarding how to respond to the situation, but mostly I was just *in* each of the situations, doing what felt like the right thing to do. “The right thing to do” flowed so smoothly and felt so natural that it never occurred to me that people with intense triggers and/or minimal capacity and/or impaired processing skills might have experienced the level 4 trauma of being unable to find a satisfying way to navigate these scenarios. I was able to accomplish the level 5 tasks of making sense out of each situation, and I was able to interpret the meaning of each experience without distortion. I didn’t think to myself: “I need to make sense out of these unpleasant experiences, and interpret their meaning with respect to myself,” but I *was* consciously aware of being briefly troubled by each distressing encounter, and I was aware of needing to think and talk with the Lord about each of the unpleasant experiences until I felt settled with respect to my understanding and interpretation.

In each of these situations, successfully completing the processing tasks at levels 3, 4, & 5 prevented/resolved *internal* sources of distress.

External sources of distress were also resolved. In the first scenario, I threw the pieces of the rabbit carcass into the bushes, so that by the time I was finished I was no longer in the presence of the disgusting stimuli. In the second scenario, I picked up the trash and put it in my pack, so that by the time I was finished I was no longer being confronted by the litter that had caused my anger and sadness. Furthermore, I worked with the Lord regarding the inconsiderate hikers who had dropped the trash, so that by the time I was finished I could release them as an external source of distress. In the third scenario, the external source of distress resolved as I recognized that the large animal was a deer (as opposed to something that could truly be dangerous, such as a mountain lion or bear).

Finally, after I had successfully completed each journey through the processing pathway, and after external sources of distress had also been resolved, level 4 neurological circuits calmed the distressing negative emotions. As the joy from my attuned relational connection with the Lord no longer had to share space with negative emotions, I returned to the subjective experience of feeling *joyful* (joy without simultaneous negative emotions).

Painful experiences we cannot fully resolve, and therefore store as traumatic memories:

****Examples pending****

Unique processing for the experience of being triggered: When you are triggered, there are two separate layers of painful experience that need to be resolved. The first, more superficial layer is the painful experience in the present, including the component of being triggered. The second, deeper layer is the underlying traumatic memories for the original painful experiences that have not yet been resolved. My observations are that these two layers must be processed separately, and that successful processing for the first layer must be completed before the second layer can be processed. Fully processing the painful experience of being triggered therefore requires “two laps around the track.” Furthermore, processing for the first layer is unique because the *only* truly satisfying way for level 4 to handle the situation is to recognize that you are being triggered, and then take responsibility for finding and resolving the underlying traumatic memories; and the *only* way for level 5 to truly make sense out of the situation is to realize that you are being triggered, and to realize that implicit memory content from underlying traumatic memories is contributing to the puzzling aspects of the present situation. After successfully completing these level 4 and level 5 tasks for the present experience of being triggered, you can then resolve the second layer by going through the processing pathway for the underlying traumatic memory.

For example, ****example pending****

XI. Distorted level 5 interpretations and “two laps around the track” for processing at levels 4 and 5:

Maintaining organized attachment at level 1, staying connected at level 2, and maintaining access to relational connection circuits,...etc at level 3 are all accomplished for both layers simultaneously as you access and begin working with the traumatic memory. However, processing at levels 4 and 5 must be accomplished separately for each of the two layers. Fully processing traumatic memories with level 5 distorted interpretations therefore requires “two laps around the track” with respect to processing at levels 4 and 5.

Level 4, first lap: You can't figure out how to handle the original traumatic situation because triggered left sided emotions based on distorted level 5 interpretations are hindering you. The "first lap" solution to "how do I handle this situation?" is to focus on resolving the distorted interpretations, and specifically to cooperate with everything necessary to accomplish this. Then, after the distorted interpretations have been resolved, you can return for a second lap of figuring out how to handle the original situation, *but without the distorted interpretations to hinder the process.*

Level 5, first lap: Resolve distorted interpretations.

Level 4, second lap: return to the original situation, now *without* distorted interpretations hindering you, and finish level 4 processing (with level 4 skills that you already have, or get help from Jesus/community). Note: after resolving the distorted interpretations, the level 4 "second lap" of finding a satisfying way to handle the original situation often happens so quickly and smoothly that you don't even notice it.

Level 5, second lap: return to the original situation, now without incomplete level 4 processing or distorted interpretations hindering you, and finish level 5 "make sense out of it" processing (with level 5 skills that you already have, or get help from Jesus/community). Note: after resolving the distorted interpretations, the level 5 "second lap" of making sense out of the original situation often happens so quickly and smoothly that you don't even notice it.

XI. Theophostic® community and THRIVE: I have been extensively involved with both Theophostic® and THRIVE, and as I have talked with people who are trying to fit these two bodies of teaching together I have observed much confusion regarding Dr. Wilder's teaching that Theophostic® can only resolve level 5 problems. I think the material discussed above regarding level 5 processing and distorted interpretations can help us to finally make sense out of this confusion.

The motivation for Dr. Wilder's persistent comments about Theophostic® only resolving problems at level 5 came from his understanding of the rest of the pain processing pathway. As he studied the larger picture of what was necessary at each of the five levels of brain function, and realized that failure at *any* of the five levels could cause a painful experience to become stuck as psychological trauma, he also realized that Theophostic® *theory* only addressed distorted interpretations resulting from faulty processing at level 5. Dr. Wilder *correctly* realized that if Theophostic® theory only addressed distorted interpretations at level 5, it would be unable to explain cases that also included problems at the lower levels. In these cases, focusing only on level 5 distorted interpretations would not be effective, and the Theophostic® model would not be able to explain the problem or provide principles for resolving the problem. Dr. Wilder wanted those in the Theophostic® community to also understand the importance of the processing tasks at the four lower levels, so that they could deliberately and strategically care for these processing tasks as well. Dr. Wilder's energy about this point increased every time he encountered cases where Theophostic® had not been effective because problems at lower levels of brain function had not been addressed. These cases often ended up with both the facilitator and the client frustrated and confused, and sometimes also included the very painful experience of the client getting stuck in a place where the painful memories were activated for an extended period of time.

One important factor that contributes to confusion between Dr. Wilder and those in the Theophostic® community is that, *in actual practice*, Theophostic® is more effective than the theoretical considerations just discussed would predict. Although Theophostic® *theory* only addresses level 5 distorted interpretations, certain aspects of the Theophostic® *process* and certain Theophostic® *techniques* actually address problems at levels 3 and 4; and this is especially the case if the person facilitating the session has high capacity, good maturity skills, and is able to perceive the Lord's guidance.⁸⁵ Some Theophostic® facilitators, with especially good capacity, maturity skills, and discernment, are also able to intuitively navigate problems at levels 1 and 2.⁸⁶ Furthermore, if the client ends up perceiving the Lord's tangible presence in some way, and is able to connect with Jesus (as often happens spontaneously in Theophostic®-based sessions), *Jesus* addresses problems at all five levels, *even if the Theophostic® facilitator does not recognize or understand what the Lord is doing or how He's doing it*.

One of the consequences of these dramatically and surprisingly good results, that occur in *some* Theophostic® sessions, has been the following (now very understandable) misunderstanding: Dr. Wilder, looking at Theophostic® *theory* and at cases where Theophostic® sessions did *not* turn out well, came up with the valid conclusions and concerns described above; however, many in the Theophostic® community, such as myself, observed the dramatically and surprisingly good results that appeared to contradict Dr. Wilder's conclusions. When I thought about sessions I had observed, where gifted facilitators and/or a strong connections with Jesus had resolved the most difficult and intense traumatic memories, it seemed clear that Dr. Wilder's comments were not consistent with my experience. I experienced the most intense dissonance between Dr. Wilder's comments and my personal observations when he gave examples of the kinds of situations that Theophostic® should not be able to handle, and I thought to myself: "I've seen Theophostic® sessions where problems exactly like those he's describing were completely resolved." What I and others in the Theophostic® community missed was that these especially dramatic examples of "Theophostic®" efficacy were actually the result of especially gifted facilitators (and/or Jesus) applying principles, process, and techniques that *were* consistent with Dr. Wilder's theory, but that were *not* actually a part of Theophostic® theory.

A second important factor that contributes to confusion between Dr. Wilder and those in the Theophostic® community is that many (such as myself) have misunderstood Dr. Wilder's point. When Dr. Wilder said "Theophostic® only resolves *processing problems* at level 5 – Theophostic® resolves distorted interpretations, and these distorted interpretations come from faulty processing at level 5," I understood him to be saying: "Theophostic® cannot resolve *pain* associated with problems at the lower levels." And I *knew* this wasn't true. I had personally facilitated many Theophostic® sessions where resolution of trauma-associated lies had resolved pain from each of the lower four levels. I had seen intense attachment pain from level 1 immediately resolved when the trauma-associated lie "I'm all alone" was replaced with the truth

⁸⁵ Ironically, these aspects of Theophostic® *process*, that are *not* adequately explained by Theophostic® *theory*, are totally consistent with this larger theoretical model regarding the five levels of brain function, the pain processing pathway, and Immanuel.

⁸⁶ In addition to basic Theophostic® training which includes *process* and *techniques* that address problems at levels 3 and 4, advanced Theophostic® training also includes *process* and *techniques* that specifically address problems at level 2. Therefore, it is especially common to see success with problems at lower levels when observing high capacity, mature, discerning Theophostic® facilitators who have also completed advanced Theophostic® training.

“Jesus is here with me.” I had seen intense panic from level 2 immediately resolved when the trauma-associated lie “I’m going to die” was replaced with “It’s over. I’m safe now.” I had seen inability to access relational connection circuits at level 3 resolve when “It’s not safe to let anybody in” was replaced with “Some people aren’t safe, but Jesus is safe, and it’s okay to let Him in.” I had seen intense feelings of inadequacy from level 4 immediately resolve when “I should have saved him – it’s my fault that He died” was replaced with “I did the best I could. It wasn’t my fault.” In light of these observations from my own clinical experience, I could not believe that Theophostic® was unable to resolve pain from the lower levels of brain function.

The key point that explains/resolves this confusion factor is simple and “obvious” once you see it: ***distorted interpretations at level 5 can cause pain at each of the lower levels, and when Theophostic® resolves distorted interpretations that cause pain at lower levels, it will simultaneously also resolve the lower level pain that the distorted interpretations were causing.*** In these situations, the *pain* at the lower levels of brain function was not being caused by *processing problems* at these levels, but rather by the *processing problem* at level 5, which had indirectly caused the *pain* at lower levels by producing level 5 distorted interpretations. The Theophostic® sessions had resolved the *processing problems* at level 5, and had also resolved the *pain* at lower levels that was being caused by the level 5 distorted interpretations. When I would point out these Theophostic® sessions as data points, Dr. Wilder would focus on the fact that I was describing examples of resolving *processing problems* at level 5 – these examples that I was citing were *not* examples of Theophostic® resolving *processing problems* at lower levels.⁸⁷ I, on the other hand, would focus on the fact that these sessions had resolved *pain* from lower levels of brain function – these sessions *were* examples where Theophostic® had resolved more than just *pain* from level 5. And we would pass like two ships in the night.

XII. Miscellaneous related subjects:

A. Processing tasks must be completed from *inside* the painful experience: This point has been included in pieces throughout the above discussion, but I want to note again that you have to successfully complete the processing tasks from *inside* the painful experience – either at the time of the original experience or from inside the memory of the experience (while the memory is triggered). This is true for level 3, where you need to be able to maintain access to your relational connection circuits, maintain the presence of the relational aspect of your self,...etc *while feeling the negative emotions*. This is true for level 4, where you need to be able to run a simulation of the proposed satisfying response *while being inside the memory and feeling the emotional pain* – as opposed to just knowing (theoretically) what you ‘ought’ to do if you were to encounter the situation again. And this is true for level 5, where you need to formulate an explanation that makes sense out of the experience and correctly interprets the meaning of the experience with respect to yourself, and that *feels* true from the *inside* of the painful experience.

This is easiest to see for processing at level 5 when you think about working with distorted level 5 interpretations. When we are *not* triggered – when the traumatic memory is *not*

⁸⁷ As discussed above, even though Theophostic® *theory* only addresses processing problems at level 5, certain aspects of the actual Theophostic® *process* can sometimes result in resolving processing problems at levels 3 and 4; however, in many of my conversations with Dr. Wilder I had not yet focused this piece of the picture, and was focusing only on the confusion caused by the misunderstanding discussed in this section (miscommunication regarding *processing problems* versus *pain*).

activated – when we are *not* “inside” the traumatic experience – when the distorted level 5 interpretations do *not* feel true, we can usually easily see that they are erroneous. Unfortunately, thinking about the trauma-associated distorted beliefs from the “outside” of the traumatic memory does *not* permanently resolve them. For healing work to permanently resolve distorted level 5 interpretations, you need to reprocess the distorted interpretations from the “inside” of the traumatic experience – from the place where the traumatic memories are active and *feel* true.

For traumatic memories that include distorted level 5 interpretations, this means you have to complete each of the processing tasks *while the distorted interpretations associated with the trauma are active and feel true*. That is, when you are working with a given traumatic memory, you cannot put all the distorted level 5 interpretations “off line” while you are working on other processing tasks, and then only activate each distorted interpretation when you have gotten to level 5 processing tasks and are ready to work on that particular lie. This is part⁸⁸ of why distorted interpretations are so costly in hindering the resolution of traumatic memories, and why resolution of distorted interpretations facilitates the healing process so dramatically.

B. The mutual mind component of attunement is slightly different for left-sided emotions: With attunement for right-sided emotions, level 4 feeling satisfied/inadequate, and level 5 understanding/confusion, mirror neurons generate a complete mutual mind connection of sharing the exact same emotional experience; However, with left-sided cognition-based emotions, you can attune without the same level of complete mutual mind connection. With attunement for left-sided emotions, mirror neurons produce mutual mind for the emotional component portrayed on your face, but do not produce mutual mind for the *cognition-based meaning*. This results in some degree of empathy and “being with,” but you do not, necessarily, share the exact same cognition based meaning. You *can* share the same cognition based meaning, if resonance triggering activates the same cognition-based meaning in your mind and brain, but mirror neurons do not automatically generate mutual mind regarding the cognition-based meaning.

C . Implications for therapies/ministries that focus on catharsis: Some forms of therapy are built around the theory that it is inherently helpful to feel and express the emotional pain associated with painful experiences. Interventions in these forms of therapy are organized around the central objective of helping the person connect with his traumatic memories, and then feel and express the emotional pain associated with the traumatic memories. However, the model described here does not predict that it will be helpful to simply feel and express the emotional pain associated with traumatic memories. In our model, connecting with a traumatic memory is a necessary part of working to move forward on the processing pathway, but if you *only* activate the traumatic memory, without provide any other interventions that help the person move forward on his journey through the processing pathway, you are simply re-exposing him to the toxic content from the traumatic memory. For example, our model

⁸⁸ I say “part” because these comments only address how the distorted interpretations associated with a given traumatic memory will *always, inherently* be active when you are working on processing tasks for *that memory*. Since it is common for more than one traumatic memory to be triggered/active at the same time, you can be working on processing tasks for one particular memory, and have distorted interpretations from other traumatic memories also interfering with the process. The good news is that resolving distorted interpretations in one memory will make it easier to work with other memories.

would predict that critical incident debriefing that simply activates memories for a traumatic event by talking about it, but does not provide specific interventions to help the person move forward on his processing journey, will actually make the person worse instead of better.⁸⁹

D. Hyper-learned left-hemisphere responses: Recent research with functional brain scans shows that while a motor action sequence is being learned, many areas of the brain are involved, including a number of the higher cortical areas, *and specifically including circuits that we are consciously aware of and that involved choice*. However, once a motor skill has been learned to a certain point of mastery, its execution becomes “automatic,” and involves only a small number of much more primitive neurological circuits towards the back of the brain.⁹⁰ This is consistent with many other research studies that show important changes as skills are learned to an expert level – as a skill is hyper-learned, the implementation of the skill is actually moved to different brain circuits that are non-conscious, involuntary in certain respects, and much faster.⁹¹ The skill of dribbling a basket ball provides an excellent “real life” example. When you first learn to play basket ball, you must focus a large portion of your conscious attention and voluntary decision making on the task of dribbling. However, expert basketball players hyper-learn dribbling to the point where they can do it without thinking about it, so that they can concentrate their conscious attention and voluntary decision-making on team strategy and other more complex aspects of the game. My observation is that this same phenomena can occur with left-hemisphere emotional and cognitive responses. That is, you can have a left-hemisphere emotional/cognitive response that contains language-based cognitions, cognition-based emotions, and other left-sided content, such as judgments and contempt, *but that has been rehearsed so many times that its **implementation** is now handled by non-conscious, involuntary, fast circuits.*

Knowing about hyper-learned left-sided responses can be helpful when trying to understand and/or repair the damage that negative hyper-learned left-sided responses cause in relationships. The key is to realize that a person does *not* make a conscious, voluntary choice to implement a hyper-learned left-sided response at the point of each occurrence, but that these hyper-learned cognitive/emotional packages can *look like* left-sided phenomena that a person usually does have more conscious awareness of and voluntary control over. Outside observers therefore usually perceive them to be voluntary, and demand responsibility and accountability that would be appropriate for fully conscious, voluntary behavior. However, the person displaying the hyper-learned left-sided cognitions and emotions experiences them as involuntary, “reflex” responses, and will usually object strenuously when accused of consciously choosing the hurtful left-sided content. I *do* need to take ultimate responsibility for my hyper-learned responses – they are *my* responses, *I* made the repeated choices that led

⁸⁹ Fortunately for our model, this prediction is consistent with research showing that some forms of critical incident debriefing seem to exacerbate symptoms, as opposed to providing any measurable benefit.

⁹⁰ Putemans, V.; Wenderoth, N.; Swinnen, S.P., “Changes in brain activation during the acquisition of a multifrequency bimanual coordination task: from the cognitive stage to advanced levels of automaticity.” *J Neuroscience*, 2005, Vol. 25, No. 17, pages 4270-4278.

⁹¹ For an excellent brief discussion of the changes that occur as a specific activity is practiced extensively (including references to the research studies supporting the discussion), see the material on automaticity (pages 98&99) and development of expertise (pages 279-813) in Anderson, John R., *Cognitive Psychology and Its Implications*, (New York, NY: Worth Publishers), 2000.

to them becoming hyper-learned responses, and *I* am responsible for how they affect others. I am especially responsible for diligently engaging in the difficult, repeated practice required to *unlearn* them. But when interpreting my intention, and the meaning of these responses in current relationships, it is helpful to realize that I am *not* making conscious choices to implement these “reflex” responses each time they occur in the present.

It is also important to recognize and understand hyper-learned left-hemisphere responses because a very specific intervention is required to dismantle them. You don’t resolve a hyper-learned “reflex” response by working with traumatic memories to resolve inadequately processed right-sided emotions, inadequacy, confusion, or distorted interpretations. You don’t resolve a hyper-learned “reflex” response by repenting of sin, renouncing vows, or dealing with demonic spirits. The only way to resolve a hyper-learned reflex response is to *unlearn* it by practicing the opposite response. A hyper-learned left-hemisphere package may also be associated with unresolved traumatic memories, and in these cases you will need to address any unresolved processing tasks included in the unresolved memories. A hyper-learned left-hemisphere package may also be associated with sin, vows, and demonic infection, and in these cases you will need to address these issues. But to dismantle a hyper-learned left hemisphere cognitive/emotional response, you must always also include a component of unlearning through practicing the opposite response. *Unlearning* is a necessary part of dismantling these *learned* responses, and you can engage in “unlearning practice” much more deliberately and effectively if you recognize hyper-learned responses and understand that unlearning is necessary.⁹²

Furthermore, it is important to be aware of this phenomena so that it does not present confusing data points that appear to contradict our model regarding right-sided and left-sided emotions. In some ways, hyper-learned left-sided responses look and behave like fast, involuntary, non-cognitive, right-sided emotions that are produced by nonconscious processes, and in other ways they look and behave like left-hemisphere phenomena that are implemented by slower, voluntary, cognition-based, conscious processes. Hyper-learned left-sided responses do *not* fit in our model as either right-sided or left-sided emotions, but they make complete sense and fit just fine when you recognize them for what they are.

Let me provide an example from my own experience. When I am trying to communicate about something that feels emotionally important to me, if Charlotte misunderstands me, I experience an immediate flash of anger, judgment, and contempt. The intensity of this response is much greater than warranted by the minor mis-communications that usually trigger it, and its content is more than just right-sided frustration/anger in response to being thwarted in my attempt to communicate. In addition to anger, the package that comes forward also contains left-sided language-based cognitions and cognition-based judgment and contempt – usually something along the lines of: “Stupid! Idiot! I would never be so dense as to fail to understand what has just been said, and the only reason you could *possibly* fail to understand me is that you’re being lazy, thoughtless, and selfish in your lack of attuning to me. You deserve to be punished, and I have the right to judge and punish you (with my anger and contempt). Hopefully this punishment will motivate you to change.” I would never

⁹² Note: since the hyper-learned response is implemented by involuntary, non-conscious circuits, you can’t practice not having it, but you can practice what you do *after* the response occurs. Our observation is that a hyper-learned response can be dismantled by practicing some kind of opposite response *after* each time the hyper-learned reflex response occurs.

actually *say* these things to Charlotte, and was not even fully consciously aware of these thoughts at first, but the judgment and contempt would come out in my facial expressions and voice. Charlotte would perceive the judgment and contempt, and challenge me regarding them, and then I would look more carefully at my thought content. Every time Charlotte challenged me, and I carefully examined my cognitions, I would find judgmental and contemptuous thoughts that were driving the judgment and contempt on my face and in my voice.

Some aspects of this angry, judgmental, contemptuous package looked like involuntary, non-conscious behavioral reflexes or right-sided emotions. For example, when Charlotte would misunderstand me, it felt like this response would flash forward, as a package. No matter how carefully I observed the phenomena, I could not perceive any of the left-sided processes, where cognitions come forward, and then drive emotions, with conscious awareness of this process and a sense that you have choices about how to respond to the thoughts/beliefs that are coming forward. My subjective experience was that this whole package would flash forward, instantaneously, as an involuntary reflex, with no place where choice was involved and no conscious awareness of the underlying processes. However, other aspects of this angry, judgmental, contemptuous package looked like left-sided phenomena that would include conscious awareness and voluntary choice. For example, anger can be a “clean,” right-sided response to being threatened or thwarted, but judgment and contempt are left-sided emotions that can only come from underlying left-sided judgmental and contemptuous thoughts. And as I examined my judgmental response more carefully, I indeed found underlying judgmental and contemptuous thoughts as described above.

The language-based cognitions and cognition-based judgment and contempt that were included in the package looked like left-sided phenomena, but the instantaneous, involuntary, and non-conscious aspects all looked like right-sided phenomena. This caused much additional distress, because Charlotte insisted that I take more responsibility for the anger, judgment, and contempt that would flash forward, as if more conscious awareness and voluntary choice were involved; but I strenuously resisted this, because even after many hours of carefully observing this response and trying to work on resolving this toxic behavior, I knew that it did *not* feel like other left-sided phenomena where I *did* have more conscious awareness and voluntary control. Part of the confusion that contributed to our conflict was that this package of anger, judgment, and contempt did not fit the picture for either right-sided emotions or left-sided phenomena. Now I can see that this cognitive, emotional, behavioral package is a perfect example of a hyper-learned left-sided response, with *content* that comes from left sided processes, but with *implementation* that has been transferred to primitive, fast, involuntary, non-conscious, “reflex” circuits.

As I put the pieces together now, I can see that I began practicing this particular package of left-sided anger, judgment, and contempt early in my childhood. I think one of the biggest sources contributing to this response was an episode of being separated from my parents when I was two years old. Mom got mononucleosis when she was pregnant, and became so sick that she could not get out of bed. As a result, my brother and I were sent to stay with friends of the family for several weeks. Unfortunately, at two years old, I was too young to understand what was happening. In my experience, my parents suddenly disappeared, and they were gone so long that I responded internally as if they had died. When I finally went back home, I was all tangled up inside from this confusing, traumatic experience, but at two

years old I was not able to communicate any of this. Piecing together memory fragments and other bits of information from my family, my perception is that my attempts to communicate mostly consisted of being persistently anxious, fussing, fighting with my siblings, and acting out in other ways. Not surprisingly, this did not accomplish effective communication regarding the confusion and pain I was needing to understand and trying to talk about.

When my attempts to communicate failed, instead of standing straight in the pain of being misunderstood and frustrated, and especially the pain of feeling powerless to do anything about it, I learned to “protect” myself from these unpleasant emotions by engaging in angry judgment and contempt. Anger was less unpleasant than feeling misunderstood, and instead of feeling helpless and powerless, I felt like I was exercising the power of judgment and contempt to punish the other person, and that I could use this punishment to make them change.⁹³ Of course this was all very primitive at two and a half years old, but the basic pieces were in place. And after developing this angry, judgmental, contemptuous response as an emotional defense, I used it in many other situations as well, such as when I felt persistently frustrated, misunderstood, and powerless during my dyslexic attempts to learn how to read.

My angry, judgmental, “reflex” response is certainly an example of a hyper-learned response also being tangled up with unfinished traumatic memory processing tasks and other issues. The memories behind my angry, judgmental, contempt response included a component of not being able to maintain or re-establish access to my relational connection circuits. In the original experiences I was not able to maintain or re-establish access to my relational connection circuits while feeling angry, misunderstood,⁹⁴ and powerless; and when I shut these memories down, this unfinished level 3 task got stored as part of the unresolved memories. Part of resolving this toxic package has been to connect with the cognitive, emotional state of being *inside* these memories, and then turn to Jesus and ask Him to help me complete the level 3 processing task of regaining access to my relational connection circuits, recovering the relational aspect of my self, re-establishing attuned relational connection, and returning to joy *while feeling the negative emotions*.

The memories behind my angry, judgmental, contempt response have included a component of not knowing what to do. In the original experiences, I did not know how to navigate the situations in which I felt so misunderstood, frustrated, and powerless, and when I shut these memories down, this unfinished level 4 task got stored as part of the unresolved memories. Part of resolving this toxic package has been to connect with the cognitive, emotional state of being *inside* the memories, and then turn to Jesus for help with finding a satisfying way to navigate the situation.

The memories behind my angry, judgmental, contempt response have included a component of distorted interpretations. In the original experiences, faulty level 5 processing resulted in distorted interpretations, such as “he’s not trying to understand me,” “they don’t want to

⁹³ For a much more detailed discussion of how we use judgment as a psychological defense, see “Judgments and bitterness as clutter that hinders prayer for emotional healing” on the “Our Theophostic®-based therapy/ministry” page of www.kclehman.com.

⁹⁴ Since attunement includes another person understanding you, sharing your feelings, and being glad to be with you, being misunderstood is a component of right-sided mis-attunement pain.

understand me,” and “she’s choosing to not listen,” and when I shut these memories down, the level 5 distorted interpretations got stored as part of the unresolved memories. Part of resolving this toxic package has been to connect with the memories where these distorted cognitions feel true, and then turn to Jesus for help with accurate interpretations.

My angry, judgmental, contempt response has been one part of a much larger pattern of sinful judgment and contempt, and part of dismantling this toxic package has been to deal with the sin component (turning to Jesus with confession, asking Him to give me true repentance, etc). Vows have contributed to the strength and persistence of my angry, judgmental, contempt response, and part of dismantling this toxic package has been to expose and resolve these vows. Finally, demonic spirits have certainly been happy to infect this hyper-learned left-sided response, with its underlying unresolved trauma and sinful judgment and contempt, and part of dismantling this toxic package has been to expose and resolve demonic infection.

However, both Charlotte and I were frustrated and disappointed as all these interventions failed to fully resolve this angry, judgmental, contempt response that has been so toxic in our relationship. We have been able to note stepwise improvement with each of the above interventions, but we also both noted that the problem was not fully resolved. As far as we can tell, an important final intervention for dismantling this hyper-learned response has been to deliberately and persistently practice the reverse response. Whenever I feel misunderstood, and my angry judgment and contempt flash forward as a fast, involuntary, reflex response, I practice a new response: I choose to stop, I choose to own responsibility⁹⁵ for my toxic judgment and contempt, I choose to stand straight in the pain of feeling thwarted, misunderstood, and powerless, and I choose to turn to Jesus and ask Him to help me. Both Charlotte and I have observed my angry, judgmental, contempt reaction to be steadily fading as I have practiced this new response, but I have had to practice choosing this new response many times.

Most readers will probably realize that this appears to be the exact same intervention I would use to continue resolving fragments of traumatic memories. However, there is one important difference with respect to *consistent* practice as opposed to *occasional* healing interventions. If the only problem is unresolved traumatic memories, then you do not have to practice a new response each time the underlying memories get triggered. If the memories get triggered five times each week, you can let most of these incidents of triggering go by, as long as you eventually get around to working on the underlying memories. Each time you work on the underlying memories you will permanently resolve another piece, and take another step forward. You will still move steadily forward, even if you only implement healing interventions on a *small percentage* of the occasions where the memories are exposed by being triggered. However, if there is a component of the problem that is a hyper-learned response, then you will not dismantle this response by *occasionally* trying a new response. If the hyper-learned response gets activated five times each week, you will not change this ingrained behavioral habit if you only practice the opposite response *occasionally*, but then reinforce the old response on most of the occasions that it gets activated. If you want to

⁹⁵ I do *not* own responsibility for it as if I choose it each time it occurs in the present, but I own that I made the choices that built the hyper-learned response, I own that my angry, judgmental response is indeed present, I own that it is toxic, and I take responsibility for dismantling it.

dismantle a bad habit, you need to practice the new, different behavior *most* of the time, and you will lose significant ground every time you indulge in the old behavior.

E. Painful experiences where we cannot *choose* to stop the pain, and increasing our “peak performance” at levels 3, 4, and 5: Both in the original painful experience and whenever the traumatic memory is triggered forward, if the pain exceeds our level 2 involuntary capacity our brain/mind involuntarily stops the pain by disconnecting. In other painful situations, we can *choose* to escape if the pain exceeds our capacity for *voluntarily* staying with the pain. For example, we can choose to run from the room if an argument is causing shame that exceeds our capacity for voluntarily staying with this painful emotion. And if we are dealing with the *memory* of a traumatic event, and the pain exceeds our capacity for voluntarily staying with trying to process the memory, we can escape by choosing to change our focus of attention and stuffing the painful experience back into its traumatic memory file. However, what happens at levels 3, 4, and 5 when we don't have capacity to *voluntarily* stay with the pain *but we can't get out*? For example, if you are surrounded by large bullies who are teasing and tormenting you, you can *not* just choose to leave. What happens when we don't have the capacity to *voluntarily* stay with the emotional pain *but we can't escape the situation*?

An obvious and unpleasant part of the answer is that we stay with the pain even though we don't want to. If we are in a painful situation where we are not able to escape, and so therefore do not have a choice regarding whether or not to stay with the pain, our capacity to voluntarily choose to stay with the pain is irrelevant. In these situations, we may desperately wish that the pain would stop, and we would choose to stop the pain if we could, but there is nothing we can do. This is an unfortunate reality in our fallen world. Sometimes we are in a painful situation, the pain has *not* gotten to the point where our level 2 involuntary mechanisms stop the pain by disconnecting, and we cannot simply choose to leave the situation.

So what happens at levels 3, 4, and 5 when we are forced to endure pain that we would otherwise choose to run away from? Part of the answer is that we discover our reserve brain capacity – we discover that our capacity to *choose* to *voluntarily* stay with the pain is usually less than our actual capacity to remain synchronized while staying with the pain. For example, there are certain painful memories from my childhood that I consistently chose to turn away from throughout my young adult life. I had limited capacity to *voluntarily* stay with the intensely painful anxiety in these memories, and so would quickly choose to shut them down as soon as they would even begin to get triggered. However, as I went through medical school and residency I encountered many situations where there was no way to escape from intensely painful anxiety; but even though these experiences were intensely painful, I stayed connected at level 2, my brain remained synchronized at levels 3, 4, and 5, and I remained able to function at a very high level. *These situations where I did not have any choice clearly demonstrated that I was able to remain connected and remain synchronized in the presence of pain intensity that I had previously always chosen to turn away from.*

A fascinating phenomena regarding physical fatigue provides a powerful analogy. Throughout most of the 20th century, the prevailing theory regarding exercise fatigue was that fatigue is an involuntary drop in performance caused by some physiological problem in the muscles. For example, lactic acid build up causing the pH to drop to the point that the

muscles no longer function properly, or glycogen depletion requiring the muscles to switch to less efficient sources of fuel. However, exercise research⁹⁶ in the last 20-30 years has discovered several data points that challenge this model:

- 1.) The suspected physiological causes of fatigue, such as lactic acid build up and glycogen depletion, do *not* always occur as we tire. That is, athletes will sometimes demonstrate decreased performance and report the subjective experience of fatigue *even though their muscles appear to be physiologically okay.*
- 2.) The older theory does not explain the phenomena called “end spurts.” For example, one 2001 study monitored performance during an hour long exercise effort that included six brief all-out sprints. Results showed that maximum power output declined steadily from the second sprint through the fifth sprint, indicating increasingly severe fatigue. However, maximum power output *increased* dramatically for the sixth and final sprint. If the steadily deteriorating results were caused solely by progressively severe physiological problems, then where did the end spurt come from?
- 3.) Studies where exertion is measured during exercise on stationary bicycles reveal that decreasing performance almost always coincides with decreasing electrical activity in the muscles. This indicates that the decreasing performance may be caused by *decreasing stimulation from the brain*, as opposed to accumulated lactic acid or depleted glycogen in the muscles.

The new theory is that an important part of fatigue – both the subjective experience and the measurable decreased performance – is actually a mind/brain phenomena. Your mind/brain is constantly assessing the overall situation, with the bottom line question being: “what will happen if I continue exertion at this level?” If the answer comes back: “I will collapse before I finish the task,” your mind/brain takes measures to prevent this predicted disaster. According to this new theory, your mind/brain prevents the predicted collapse by decreasing nerve stimulation to the muscles, generating the subjective experience of suffering, and decreasing motivation, all of which contribute to reducing overall muscular exertion. For example, if you’re running a five mile race, you’re currently at mile three, and your mind/brain decides that you will collapse before you get to the finish line if you continue your current pace, *your mind/brain will create fatigue in order to reduce your exertion, even though your muscles are still physiologically able to continue at your current pace.*

This new fatigue research has also discovered that our brains/minds like to hold back a safety reserve. For example, what happens if you are camping in Alaska, you haul firewood to the point that your muscles are utterly spent, and then a bear comes out of the woods? If your muscles are truly and utterly spent from a physiological perspective, it will not matter that your brain is now sending urgent signals to get up and run. You will just lie there and wait helplessly for the bear to come and get you! It seems that our minds/brains like to hold back a generous safety reserve, just in case we are surprised by this kind of emergency. Not only do

⁹⁶ For a discussion of this research written for lay people, see Fitzgerald, Matt. “Train Your Brain,” *Runner’s World*, March 2007, Vol. 42, No. 3, pages 63-65. For a more technical summary and discussion of this research, see Noakes, T.D.; St Clair-Gibson, A.; Lambert, E.V., “From catastrophe to complexity: a novel model of integrative central neural regulation of effort and fatigue during exercise in humans: summary and conclusions.” *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 2005, Vol. 39, pages 120-124.

our minds/brains want to make sure that we do not collapse before we get to the finish line, they want to make sure that we make it to the finish line *with some safety reserve still in the bank*.

Similarly, when dealing with emotional pain, most of us retain a “safety reserve” between the point where we choose to turn away from the pain and the point where our brains would actually begin to desynchronize. When we are dealing with painful situations where we can choose to leave, or with painful memories where we can shut the memory down by choosing to focus our attention elsewhere, most of us choose to leave/choose to change the focus of our attention before we desynchronize. My observation is that we usually only exceed our true brain capacity at levels 5, 4, 3, and therefore desynchronize at levels 5, 4, and 3, when we are in a situation where we do not have any choice about whether or not the pain continues. That is, *if we have a choice*, we usually choose to stop the pain before we desynchronize.

Back to the fatigue research: the reason athletes and coaches are so interested in this research is that this “what about the bear?” emergency reserve is not really necessary in the context of athletic competition, and it seems that *athletes can increase their peak performance by teaching their brain/mind governors that it is okay to release more of this reserve*.

Similarly, for those of us who regularly abort emotional healing sessions by choosing to shut down triggered pain long before our brains would actually desynchronize, our mind/spirit can learn to *choose* to release more of our reserve. I think of this capacity reserve – this space between our capacity to voluntarily choose to stay with the pain and our actual capacity to stay synchronized – as a window of opportunity. Many traumatic memories live in this space, and if our mind/spirit can *learn to choose* to stay with the pain, we can open this window of opportunity – we can access the traumatic memories that live in this space between the place where we usually chose to turn away from the pain and the place where we would actually begin to desynchronize. We can increase our emotional healing peak performance at levels 3, 4, and 5 by deliberately building our capacity to *voluntarily* stay with pain during emotional healing sessions.

For example, at many points on my personal healing journey I did not receive healing for a particular traumatic memory because I did not choose to stay connected to the pain when the memory would get triggered forward. On rare occasions I would be working on a memory and then consciously decide to stuff it back down instead of continuing to work on it, but on most occasions my long established patterns of *quickly* turning away from certain kinds of pain prevented me from even identifying the memories behind the triggered thoughts and emotions. As I employed a variety of tools to build my capacity to voluntarily stay with pain, I became more and more able to *choose* to stay with painful thoughts and emotions as they would get triggered forward; and as I increasingly *chose* to stay with the triggered thoughts and emotions, instead of becoming desynchronized or disconnecting, I opened the window of opportunity just described above. As I increasingly chose to stay with the triggered thoughts and emotions, I became more able to identify the underlying unresolved memories; and as I identified the underlying memories *and* chose to stay with the painful thoughts and emotions, I opened the space that was necessary to be able to work with the Lord to resolve the memories.

One last piece for people like me, who want to fill in all the details regarding brain synchronization and desynchronization, and who are therefore wondering: “What happens if we are in a painful situation, we can’t escape, and the pain just keeps increasing?” If we are in a painful situation where we are not able to escape, and the pain continues to increase, it will eventually exceed our involuntary brain capacity; and as the pain exceeds our involuntary brain capacity, we will begin to desynchronize, starting at level 5 and then progressing to levels 4 and 3. If the pain still continues to increase, your brain will eventually stop the pain by activating the involuntary disconnection mechanisms at level 2. This experience will obviously not be fully processed at the time it occurs, since you ended up desynchronized and disconnected, and so will be stored as a traumatic memory. Hopefully, at some point in the future, you will have adequate capacity and adequate maturity skills to access the memory, stay connected, and resolve the memory by finishing the tasks at all five levels of the pain processing pathway.