The Trauma of Loss

Causes, psychodynamics and traumatherapy

www.franz-ruppert.de
Two “classical” types of trauma

- caused by life threatening events (e.g. war, accidents, rape, natural catastrophies)
- caused by loss of a person (e.g. early death of parents, loss of children, adoption)
Relationships with traumatized people produce two specific types of trauma:

- Trauma of bonding (being rejected by the people one needs to bond to)
- Trauma of confusion in a bonding system (caused e.g. by murder, sexual abuse, incestuous relationships within the bonding system)
Maximum of Losses

- Death of a loved person (mother, father looses a child; child looses his parents)
- Permanent separation from a loved person
- Loss of the community, where we were born into (family, city, country)
Reason for the feelings of loss

- Emotional bonding has happened
- Relationship is vital
- There is no substitute for the lost person

What connects us with the world are emotional bonds.
When is a loss traumatic?

- The loss causes existential threat, anxieties and stress and is enormous painful
- The lost person/object can’t neither be get back again nor be forgotten
- To forget the lost person feels like a betrayal towards him/her
When traumatised we get shocked, freeze, dissociate and split the personality in order to survive.
Split of the Identity after an Experience of trauma

- Traumatized part
- Surviving part
- Healthy part

(c) Prof. Dr. Franz Ruppert
Characteristics of the traumatised parts in a loss trauma

- store the **memory** of the trauma (pictures, smells, voices, pain, anxieties, rage, grief)
- are still **engaged** with the traumatic experience (how to get into contact with the lost person again, feeling guilty, what would have been if …)
- are always the **same age** as they were, when the trauma occurred
- can unpredictably, suddenly and easily be **triggered even years after**

(c) Prof. Dr. Franz Ruppert
Characteristics of the surviving-parts in a loss trauma

- denying the loss, keeping the lost person alive
- Idealising the lost person
- Denying the emotional consequences of the loss
- keeping feelings under control e.g. with the help of medication or drugs
- trying to compensate (another child, another partner)
- producing illusions (reunion with the lost person after the own death)
Characteristics of the healthy parts of an adult personality

- true realism
- capable of regulating feelings
- contact with oneself
- ability to make safe bonds and resolving bonds if necessary
- ability of self-reflection
- self-responsibility
- love of truth
- optimism and basic confidence
- strong enough to confront traumatic experiences
Consequences of a trauma of loss

- Symptoms of depression (feelings of senselessness, no energy, emptiness, numbness, tiredness, lack of concentration, lack of appetite, lack of self confidence, difficulties to sleep well, pessimism)
- Avoiding new bonding relationships
- Escape into spiritual realms
- Aggressions and desire for revenge
- Somatic illnesses
- Unconscious reiteration of death
- Risk to enjoy suffering
- Suicid
If parents suffer from a trauma of loss this can cause a symbiotic trauma for their children (multigenerational effects).

A trauma that is experienced actually can trigger a former trauma.
What can be done?

- to grief deeply and intense about the loss not about the dead person
- to accept the loss as permanently and final
- to give up illusions of reunification
- not feeling guilty, when the lost person is no longer living, is dead and forgotten
- drawing a clear line between life and death
- taking existing relationships more serious than the relation with the lost person
Healing the Spilts after Traumatic experiences

Gate to illusions
Gate to anxieties and pain
Gate to freedom

(c) Prof. Dr. Franz Ruppert

strengthen the Healthy part
Literature

Symbioses and Autonomy

1. International conference working with constellations on the basis of bonding and trauma

Munich, 26 to 28th of October 2012

www.healthy-autonomy.de

(c) Prof. Dr. Franz Ruppert