

September, 2008

Volume 8, No. 3

VETERANS: FINDING THEIR WAY HOME WITH EFT

Ingrid Dinter

Abstract

Helping Veterans heal from the trauma of war has been a journey into a spiritual place that I might not have been able to reach otherwise. I am filled with gratitude for every soldier who has allowed me to get an insight into his or her world. These are my most amazing mentors who are giving me their loving trust and support to continue this journey.

As a life coach, specializing in Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), I have been blessed and honored to help many Veterans heal from their trauma of war. I have worked with US Marines who, even after 40 years, still can't find forgiveness for what happened in Vietnam. I have helped Veterans from most recent wars who have relived their nightmares of horror, overwhelm and danger every night.

EFT4Vets, the training program for practitioners I have developed, understands PTSD symptoms as symptoms of the soul. It offers an integrated program for practitioners that will enable the EFT coach to assist the Veterans on the physical, mental, emotional, relational and soul levels. This program honors the transformational effect that using EFT for helping Veterans to release PTSD symptoms can have on the practitioner as well as the Veteran. Building rapport and trust between the practitioner and the client before the work together begins is an integral part of the training, and so is the thorough teaching of specific applications and techniques of EFT for Veterans through presentation, demonstration and practice.

Key Words: Veterans, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, Emotional Freedom Technique, EFT, spirituality, Combat Stress

Introduction

Veterans are the light at the tip of the candle, illuminating the way for the whole nation. If veterans can achieve awareness, transformation, understanding and peace, they can share with the rest of society the realities of war. And they can teach us how to make peace with ourselves and each other, so we never have to use violence to resolve conflicts again.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Growing up in Germany in the 1960 and 70s, I realized that my father was never able to release his memories of being a prisoner of war in a Russian work camp in WWII. I feel that these experiences helped me to prepare for the work that I feel so passionate about today.

I have a dream...that someday, the soldiers who returned from war and their families, those who understand what war truly means, will be able to go out into the world and teach...

Helping Veterans heal from the trauma of war has been a journey into a spiritual place that I might not have been able to reach otherwise. I am filled with gratitude for every soldier who has allowed me to get an insight into his or her world. These are my most amazing mentors who are giving me their loving trust and support to continue this journey.

As a life coach, specializing in Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), I have been blessed and honored to help many Veterans heal from their trauma of war. I have worked with US Marines who, even after 40 years, still can't find forgiveness for what happened in Vietnam. I have helped Veterans from most recent wars who have relived their nightmares of horror, overwhelm and danger every night.

I have never seen such pain, such deep despair, guilt, shame, and complete loneliness as I have seen in those Veterans. It is the pain of the soul, the deep loss, the fear, the hopelessness and believe that there is no forgiveness, that makes these soldiers' daily life to hell.

For the ease of reading, I will use only one gender, one military or non-military rank at a time. So I might refer to the soldier as "he," however, I always mean both, male and female soldiers in all military ranks and positions. When appropriate, this also includes the family members, the nurses, doctors and aid workers, journalists and non military personnel, who have experienced the horrors of war. And it certainly honors and includes the civilian victims of war, who continue to struggle with all that happened to them, their families and their lives.

The victims of war

War is the result of a mindset of separation. As long as we believe and live as if we were separated from each other, and focus our actions on our differences instead of what we have in common, we will not be able to overcome war as a means to solve conflicts. Most societies today live, as if their own and immediate benefit was more important than the wellbeing of the whole. They have not realized yet, that we are all connected in one Universe, one soul, and that anything we do, good or bad, will indeed come back to us in powerful ways. If we seed war, we will harvest war. If we seed forgiveness, we will harvest forgiveness. The choice is ours...

War has always been part of human life and history. Wars have been fought for any reason imaginable and have been used to change just about everything people ever found important, often terminating one social system or reality and starting or supporting a new one.

The price for these shifts is being paid by those who have ended up being victimized by a society's decision to go to war: The horrors of war on both sides live on in all the civilians who didn't have the power to protect themselves and change what war did to them, their lives, their families, their dreams and existence on all levels. War lives on in those who have lost their soul, their trust, their feeling of safety. It lives on in the shattered bodies of those who will never walk or see again; those who can't sleep without nightmares; those whose marriages are broken and whose children are traumatized. War is a constant companion of those who are forced to live a life that is far removed from what they had dreamed of, planned for and deserve.

War lives on in every Veteran and his family who doesn't get the help to heal.

I WISH THAT I COULD FIND A PLACE

I wish that I could find a place...

A place where I could heal and regain faith in myself, and again feel the joy and happiness that I so long ago lost - displaced by despair and hopelessness.

A place where my friends live, if only for awhile, for I sorely need to belong...where I am accepted without judgment, and where I am loved for who I am.

A place where forgiveness reigns...where the future will become clearer and brighter...and filled with hope.

A place where I can find spirituality and wisdom, and where I can be embraced by those who know and can show me the path.

This place existed only in my dreams - until now - and I am once again me.

- Randy Kautto

I see that these Veterans, their families and everybody who loves them, became victims of war in a way that many people will never understand.

I believe it is time to take on the responsibility to help those who suffer from the consequences of the missions they have been sent to fight, whether we personally agree with the political and ethical background of warfare as a whole, a specific war, any war, or not.

When you touch fire and your hand gets burned, it is not the responsibility of the hand alone. It is the responsibility of the whole person. The hand did not touch fire by itself. It was commanded to do so by the brain, and the whole body got hurt at the same time. If the body blames the hand, that is not just. The hand acted because the body ordered it to do so. When there is good communication between the hand and the rest of the body, both the hand and the body feel better. If the body says, "You must bear the burden of your actions by yourself; I cannot forgive what you have done," that is lack of understanding.

- Thich Nath Hanh

I feel that by helping the Veterans and their families heal, we are also helping our society heal and grow. As long as trauma and fear live unrecognized, undetected and untreated, it will be next to impossible to release the need for more wars and to move on to a higher level mindset of world community, respect and peace. When I look at the global situation that we all are in today, as members of the human race, the struggle with global warming and depletion of resources, the economic interdependence, to name only a few, it becomes obvious that each decision, each action of one country, has an impact on the whole. And as much as each person has an impact on the whole, so does each individual have the power to co-create by shifting his/her mindset to community and peace. Decisions that are made out of fear, and the illusion that we might be vulnerable or insignificant if we aren't stronger than someone else, increase the fear on a global level. A mindset of victimization never allows individuals or a people to claim their power to change and transform.

We are running out of time to face our fears of each other. Releasing the need to judge what separates us, and instead replacing it with loving intentions to focus on what we have in common is going to allow us to find a way to heal our fears and wounds. We can begin this now, in the privacy of our own minds, and then let it grow and radiate around us, including those we love and those we fear, until we experience our connectedness through love. Listening to those who are suffering, learning to understand them, and realizing the importance of their motives is a first step to healing. We need the Veterans and their families to teach us about the realities of war, so that we understand the true impact of our lifestyle and fears and choose our decisions wisely.

War vs. Movement: releasing the focus on victory, and centering ourselves around what we have in common

War usually ends with either victory or loss, and the winner separates what is defined as good from what is perceived as bad. As long as we stay focused on judgment and victory, even in our personal life, we are using the mindset and strategies of war.

Social movements for healing are inclusive and are carried out with the determination to reach goals by connecting with what all participants have in common. Overcoming war requires overcoming the needs for judgment and victory, and I understand the challenge that this idea represents.

If we approach the Veterans and victims through the judgmental eyes of war, we will have to categorize them as either good or bad and act accordingly. If we explore inside ourselves and resonate with what we share in common, we can initiate surprising and powerful changes to co-create healing and balance. This is work that each of us can do from the safety of our home. It will be more powerful and transformative than any war can ever be.

I feel that it is time for a Movement; a Movement of healing that honors each of us as individuals, and allows our soul to heal.

Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT)

When I first came across Gary Craig's EFT in early 2002, I immediately recognized it as not just a new and powerful approach to healing that can be used by laypersons all over the world, as well as by practitioners and healing professionals, but also the beginning of a healing movement

as has never been seen before. With the basic teachings being available as a free download online, EFT has encouraged, honored and included people's use of intuition and special and unique gifts, even their modification into new techniques that worked better for them. I realized that the motivating energy of this technique is love, and many have benefitted in numerous ways from the generosity of the founder, Gary Craig. Many other powerful techniques have been derived from EFT, with the goal of finding the most gentle, powerful and lasting ways to heal.

Gary Craig explains that negative emotions can be understood as fears of something or someone, including our past, and that these feelings are caused by blocks or disruptions in our energy system. EFT releases these fears at the source.

EFT combines a gentle tapping technique on designated acupressure points (acupoints) on the face and body with statements that represent either the negative issues to be released or a positive outcome. EFT recreates balance in relation to those statements and what they stand for, and allows us to release negativity for good. This process often causes cognitive shifts that allow us to see the true motives and backgrounds of our feelings and actions clearly. Since EFT is such an easy method to apply and a freely available tool, it truly has the potential to allow all of us to release our fears and understand that we are indeed all connected. Readers will find a wonderful collection of reports of benefits of EFT on Gary Craig's website.

Numbers and duration of EFT sessions for Veterans

When I work with Veterans, I usually expect to work for at least six session hours with them, but this can vary depending on the client and the circumstances of our work together. Like with every client, the more time we have, the more specific memories we can release, and given the complexity of many Veterans' history and current lives, I prefer to have more time to work with them.

When I see Veterans in person, I like to offer two hour sessions as their commute to my office is usually significant, and it makes sense to keep going when we are on a roll. As Veterans are often reluctant to consider working on a traumatic event, it can take them quite some time and courage to focus of a traumatic memory. I feel that I need to be respectful of this need, asking gentle, supportive questions and listening carefully, until the traumatic event becomes evident. Then we want to have the time to clear it up completely, whenever possible.

When using the Movie Technique with EFT, our clients don't bring up the situation as a whole. Instead, they just acknowledge that it happened and we tap on taking the emotional edge off this memory. Then we split the traumatic event up in very short scenes which hold lower intensity and tap on them separately, until the whole memory has lost the emotional charge.

It is nice to have the time to finish this process in one session, however, if 60 minutes is all we have, we finish up the next time.

Another reason why I prefer to offer longer sessions, if possible, is that most of my Veterans complain about the time restrictions they have in the VA. They often report that they don't want to go back because their session time is too short and they are afraid to bring something up and end up leaving retraumatized, as they didn't have enough time to release it.

Offering an extended time frame can be very important to establishing rapport. However, in my observation, having six session hours to release past trauma with EFT usually brings profound changes for the Veterans, allowing them to feel more in control of their past and present life.

While large-scale studies are needed to scientifically support these findings, I find these observations quite encouraging.

The importance of self-care in the process of healing

Healing, even with EFT, is never a temporary task; it is a mindset of willingness to continue to release whatever negative experiences our memories and daily life events are bringing on. EFT is a wonderful, effective and powerful tool to do this daily cleanup thoroughly and effectively.

Working with Soldiers who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Symptoms, and often from pre-military trauma, is no different. Therefore, I teach and encourage all my Veterans to use EFT regularly at home on their own issues.

I often see that after the second or third session, Veterans begin to use EFT for themselves and report positive results. Using EFT in stressful situations becomes a habit for many.

I often see profound differences in those who do their own tapping, often with the DVD training material which is available on Gary Craig's website, versus those who only rely on me for help: Those who use EFT on their own quickly develop a sense of control over their lives, including their past, which fills them with self esteem, pride and a feeling of personal power. They experience more joy and begin to make changes and new decisions in their lives. They release their feeling of victimization, which allows healing to occur much more quickly. So empowering Veterans to do their homework is an integral part of our work together and supports the importance of EFT as a self-help tool.

Moving on with what connects us

If we truly want to heal and move beyond war as the solution for conflicts, it is of the essence that we learn to understand and to cooperate in what we all share and have in common, rather than focusing upon what separates us. Our physical bodies are separate, which leads to the illusion that human beings are separate as well. But we share our thoughts, our feelings and beliefs in a global consciousness. Even if we disagree with a thought, we may resonate with it on a deeper level.

Wherever we focus our minds, our reality will follow. Whatever we believe as a group creates powerful shifts that can radiate out to others. We can use this concept for healing ourselves and each other. And, yes, it seems challenging to begin this adventure in our minds, and it might take a while until we are done – but why wait to get started?

The pain of the victims of war introduces other elements that manifest in the global consciousness. The Veterans, having been actively and passively involved in what happens in war, are carrying this pain in very complex ways. They are also bringing pain into the collective consciousness of their nation. For example, when hundreds of thousands of Veterans don't get the support, compassion, forgiveness and healing they deserve, this consciousness of suffering also impacts their society as a whole. We are, to use Thich Nath Hanh's parable, the body that

the hand belongs to. Once we understand our wholeness, we can then see that we are connected with the Veterans and their families in powerful ways.

The transformation begins within: We can respond to the Veterans' pain with anger, blaming 'others' for Veterans' injuries or for not providing the much needed help. But this would only continue the cycle of fear, hatred and war. Or, we can take charge and see our own responsibility in what happened to them and in war, actively or passively, and help change this reality from despair and pain to peace, respect, responsibility and love. .

All the Veterans that I have worked with have reported, after clearing their issues with EFT, that they not only feel a long forgotten sense of peace now, but also the responsibility to help others heal who were in their situation. Peace radiates peace; war radiates war. The decision is ours, and the process begins within, one person at a time. Once we have decided to shift our energies to compassion and healing for all victims of war, including all Veterans and those who suffer with them, then transformations of our own experiences of their pain will follow.

When we, as practitioners of EFT, help Veterans to heal, we can also allow ourselves to resonate with compassion with their resistance to healing and reconnecting with their soul. Together, we can gently address and tap on the memories, fears and beliefs that are causing the pain, and find the most appropriate way to release them. Offering forgiveness, love and compassion in this way, can truly start a collective spiritual movement of healing. It is a tremendous joy and honor to be a part of this transformation.

FLASHBACK

*I relive Experiences, under Heavy Mortar Attack.
I heard the distant 'thump' 'thump' 'thump' sounds,
Of Mortar rockets leaving their Tubes. As those incoming rounds approached,
Truly and Unforgettable Whistling Sound,
Echoing and Reverberating the Stillness of the Night.
Each round whistled its High-Pitched Song of Death
Penetrating and illuminating the blackness of the night.
I wondered which one would take my last Breath?
As each incoming round announced its Arrival,
Our training kicked in, it's time for Survival.
The 'Attack Siren' wails, "INCOMING" "INCOMING" is repeated
Men scurry, barking orders on the run.
Brave anguished faces displaying raw horror.
Exploding shells, hot chunks of metal Hurling
Constant concussions, decibels deafening.
A Grayish-White cloudy smoke fills the Air,
Sparks and embers dance as fires flare.
I hear Screams "Doc over here," "I'm hit,"
No time for agony, or doubt, "Move Out."
I wished I was invisible, but they just kept on
Whistling & Exploding, Whistling & Explodin.
"Incoming," coming in*

- E.Everett McFall

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – a humanitarian catastrophe in the making

It has been through the intense contact with my Veterans and their stories that my eyes were opened to the humanitarian drama we are currently facing with the returning soldiers and their families. Their suffering is usually silent, and the true extent of this drama has not even begun to show. They keep to themselves, talking to each other but hardly ever outside of the military community. Even my contacts within the military confirmed that it is next to impossible to convince a soldier, who suffers from PTSD symptoms, to ask for help. As long as emotional pain is seen as weakness, and asking for help can carry the risk of ending a military career, this is most likely not going to change.

Assessing and releasing PTSD symptoms with EFT

When I first started helping Veterans with PTSD, I went online to find out more about this diagnosis and how it was made. To my surprise, all I could find was a collection of symptoms. Those symptoms include insomnia, nightmares and intrusive thoughts, denial of problems and their seriousness, excessive anger and aggression, hyper-vigilance and physical symptoms such as headaches, to name only a few, and are explained as a response to terrifying trauma. As the symptoms of PTSD show up on the physical, mental, emotional and soul level, the approach to healing should include the whole person as well.

PTSD is assumed to be present if a Veteran scores 50 points or higher on the PCL-M, a standardized military diagnostic questionnaire. Treatments in military and Veterans' hospitals and clinics usually include medications and conventional forms of psychotherapy. At the same time, Veterans are usually told that PTSD cannot be healed. In my experience, however, there is a lot we can do to improve their condition profoundly.

Sometimes, "Having less to unlearn" can be a good thing (to quote Roger Callahan – the founder of Thought Field Therapy (TFT) and grandfather of many Energy Psychology healing modalities, including EFT). As an EFT specialist and life coach, I don't diagnose or treat disease or work with individual symptoms. I have a very different approach.

Let me explain this mindset with the example of insomnia in Veterans, a powerful component of PTSD. Again, for the ease of reading, I will only use one gender or military rank in this writing, but I always mean both genders and military ranks, and, where appropriate, also the non-military victims of war. Insomnia is often treated with drugs by conventional therapists. Insomnia certainly has a physical aspect, as the body can't go to sleep. But it is also emotional, as the person is lying awake, tortured by fears, anger, guilt and other trauma that he has been dealing with for so long..

Insomnia has a mental component that doesn't allow the mind to shut off as it desperately tries to come to terms with what happened in the past and with fears of the future. The mind often replays traumatic memories and feelings over and over again – without successful resolution of the traumas.

Insomnia in Veterans also has a soul component, as they often feel separated from their true self, their inner being, their center of love, trust, compassion and life at its core. All aspects of human life are incorporated in insomnia; and even though drugs can often help to shut down the mind and body long enough to give a person some rest, this kind of medication often comes with side effects that the soldiers I have worked with described as highly undesirable. They complain about drowsiness and always being in a fog, and not feeling like themselves anymore. These drugs also don't usually release the deeper mental and emotional causes of the

insomnia, so that the soldiers have to continue to take if they want to sleep. In my experience, nightmares and intrusive thoughts tend to come back until their true causes are resolved.

With EFT, we can work in a completely different, highly effective way. With EFT, our goal is not to understand *why* someone is hurting but *that* someone is hurting. We don't work on the cognitive-behavioral aspect of healing, which has its place in therapeutic settings for sure, but we work on the energetic level of the problem, recreating balance in the human energy field, where trauma has disrupted major energy pathways. By tapping on designated acupoints on the face and body, while focusing on the problem as specifically as possible, we simply take the emotional charge out of what happened in the past and help the person feel neutral and clear about the trauma rather than numb. EFT is applied very gently and carefully, always giving the Veteran a sense of control over the process. It is important to be mindful and respectful of our clients' individual needs in this process. Using EFT in a skillful way usually allows us to help release a block in the energy system, and the intensity that goes with it, just by recognizing the existence of a traumatic event. This release occurs well before the feelings attached to the memory emerge with the full intensity of the original experience. In addition, we can balance the energy field in relation to positive statements and affirmations, so that the true self of the soldier can come back into harmony.

The tapping is done by the client him/herself, and can be used as a self help tool. The practitioner coaches the client through the process, while the client is encouraged to change the affirmations to what works best for him/her.

In the initial rounds of EFT, the purpose is always to establish comfort with this unusual technique and bring results that are measurable and highly desirable so that the person feels comfortable and positively surprised and encouraged. One way of doing this is by tapping on physical symptoms and discomfort first. This is often easier for the Veteran, as the improvements are measurable and desirable without touching emotional issues. After trust and rapport is established, we can help our clients to release "core issues," which are deeper, usually more painful memories that lay the foundation for how we feel about our life. I almost always see that sleep improves immediately when a core issue has been resolved, often even after just one session. The content of the sessions varies greatly. I follow my client's needs, and we work with whatever he or she wants to begin with. This can include specific war trauma as well as negative childhood memories and other pain that might be related. We address beliefs, feelings of safety, trust, not being good enough and other such issues. Sometimes, we simply start with a general feeling of having no energy, feeling 'wired,' or having thoughts bouncing around in their head like bumper cars.

When nightmares are reported by a soldier, I ask what they remind him of. By tapping on the specific events that they represent, or by working with the nightmares more symbolically, we establish balance in his energy field that usually releases the nightmare for good.

When we work on intrusive thoughts and feelings such as uncontrollable anger about memories or circumstances of life, or the immediate desire to withdraw under stress, we seek to find out when they first started and what they remind the person of. Going deeper, we may explore why, from some aspect of his being, he might believe that the disturbing intrusive thought feels like a good or desirable thing – and then use EFT to release those beliefs as well.

It is at first a surprising experience for a Veteran when he realizes that he is supposed to tap on his head and body to release trauma that has been present for months or even years. But once

this concept is accepted and EFT is used, the wonder and disbelief on the soldier's face when he cannot bring up the feelings he used to have for years is truly joyful to see.

PTSD and the soul

The Veterans and family members I have worked with feel that PTSD is not a mental illness, PTSD is a symptom of the soul. They describe "losing their soul," "something breaking inside," "a disconnect from the outer world and from their own true self." The result is overwhelming loneliness, emptiness, living with "a wall" that protects them from the outer world. Every Veteran I have worked with who was diagnosed with PTSD has confirmed this in some form as his reality: The soul seems to be gone, broken away at the moment of terror, when survival of the self hung on a moment's decision and often caused much pain to others, even taking someone else's life. After this rupture in their perception of life happened, things were never the same again.

It is easy to talk to a soldier about his soul, asking: "When was the time you last felt connected?" or "What happened before you felt your soul was leaving?" All of the severely traumatized soldiers I have worked with had surprisingly clear answers to that question, and those are usually some of the core issues we work with. They know that something is missing in them and they feel that they can't access it anymore. They don't know how to get back to who they were, and have become lost and hopeless.

Adjusting to this state of being "separated from the soul" is hard, and often comes at a high cost. Relationships outside of the military and Veterans' community become complicated and are often felt to be undesirable. Families break apart and job relationships can't be kept up. People struggle through life, not knowing how to rest, not finding peace in anything they do. What used to be enjoyable has lost its meaning now, and there seems to be no hope that this will ever change. Nightmares and intrusive thoughts, hypervigilance, anger and fear of connecting with and confronting others are all symptoms of a disconnect from the soul. Life has become a meaningless struggle for many of these men and women in ways that people in the outside world might not recognize or understand. When we can't feel our soul in anything, nothing has meaning anymore.

Many choose to self-medicate with alcohol or street drugs to make it through the day. And almost every day, the news reports that more and more Veterans decide to take their own lives. As many as 120 Veterans a week opt out of life by suicide (CBS News).

When offering EFT, we may be honored to witness a soldier reconnecting with his soul, releasing the feelings of loneliness and isolation, and claiming his power back as an individual who now sees meaning and purpose in life.

PTSD and forgiveness

"You just don't understand!" said the man with the coarse voice. "I was a sniper! I was Rambo! I killed these people! And I didn't even think twice of it!"

'Bruce', a Vietnam Veteran who hasn't gotten a full night's sleep since the late 1960s, haunted by nightmares and intrusive thoughts, waited a little bit before he could find it within himself to continue. "You have to understand: I was one of the most highly trained soldiers they had. We were elite. And there were only a few of us. We were told that we

were invincible. I speak Vietnamese in my sleep and I don't remember ever having learned it. I have skills that I don't know of until they show, and I am scared as hell about what I am able to do. I have done so much. There is no reason to forgive me. It was all my fault."

We had already done vast amounts of EFT together over the phone. One of the issues that was causing his nightmares was the time when he was captured and thrown in a hole that was only wide enough for him to stand up in, his hands tied behind his back, covered with spiders, beaten and tortured. Several times a day a Vietnamese soldier came by and dumped more spiders over him. After three days, Bruce freed himself and killed his torturer with his bare hands.

Bruce never forgot this memory. It haunted him through his five marriages and more than 50 jobs that he had held since Vietnam. We took this memory, scene by scene, and released the emotional charge it had for him. This was the first time that he could think about it without being upset.

But when Bruce started telling the story of the people he had killed, including a little boy and his father who died in the bus he had blown up, he didn't want me to interrupt. He didn't want to tap, he wanted to scream his guilt out into the world, taking the blame and claiming his responsibility for what had happened. How could he possibly consider forgiveness and find peace?

And what was my role in this? I knew that I was listening to the testimonial of a tortured soul, who had done inexcusable things on command. He had been specifically trained for his mission, his brain and mind prepared in many ways, until he was able to execute commands without hesitation. And I had to somehow find a way to allow him to find peace... Or did I?

Bruce is one of the men that have taught me a great deal about forgiveness and its relation to the symptoms of PTSD, as I was challenged to find the open door that allows for unconditional healing to occur.

I feel that PTSD is a result of being exposed to actions or circumstances that we believe cannot be forgiven. This is true for victims as well as for aggressors.

If we refuse to forgive from a spiritual point of view, we allow for the horror, the anger and hurt to live on in all of us. If we host and foster the judgment and blame against Veterans in the way that it happened after Vietnam, then negativity and fear will continue to regain strength in us, until it collects enough momentum in the global consciousness to break out again.

Excuse vs. reason

We have to find a way not to justify what happened, but to understand it from a soul's perspective and forgive unconditionally. There are true and valid reasons in our lives that have prepared us for the things we do. When we understand and accept this without finding excuses or changing the reality of what happened, we can find a door to healing that we can then walk through with EFT. Our fears have already caused many wars, and will continue to do so, unless, we are able to see what truly happened, embrace it and forgive unconditionally.

Forgiveness requires letting go of the need for victory.

I will never forget the faces of the soldiers who, after sharing some of their horrific memories, asked me, shyly: "What do you think of me now?" I realized that their true questions were, "How can I deserve forgiveness for what I have done?" and "How can I ever have a normal life again after all that I have been through, all that I have seen?"

During our EFT sessions, I got to know my Veterans well. They told me about their backgrounds, often also about their childhood. We tapped on the details of the traumas they could not overcome, whenever they were willing and able to share them. It was wonderful to see how EFT helped them to take the charge out of their traumatic memories. I observed that once the healing had happened, people would begin to see their actions in the context of their life, their upbringing and training.

At this point they began to see the current limitations they had had when making decisions, how one thing led them to the next and, even though they wished they could have done better, they now saw how the situations surrounding their PTSD were created in the context of their life experiences and their reactions to these. EFT released the guilt that was holding them hostage, and allowed them to find their own ways to move forward.

Before we did our work together, they had often spent many years without hope that there could be forgiveness for what they had seen and done in war. Prior to clearing their PTSD symptoms, they felt misunderstood by the “outside world” and felt that they couldn’t forgive society for letting them down after what war had done to them and others. Their past haunted them with every step they were taking, and they had given up on the hope that this would ever change..

Those who live through the war as civilians can play an important part in the Veterans’ healing or unfolding of PTSDs. Soldiers are often not enough prepared by the military for returning to civilian life. Their training, their experience of their own power in war, their memories and traumas make them feel that nobody outside of the military will ever understand them - that the “outside world” is a judgmental and unsafe place.

When soldiers return from war, and are not welcomed back with compassion and open arms, when they feel that those who sent them to war don’t take responsibility for what happened while it was being fought and the victims it created, then Veterans can slide away into the darkness of their soul. Veterans often feel they carry the blame for the horrors of war, not just blaming themselves, but being blamed by those who lived through the war at home. Some of the first feelings that usually come up are anger at being cheated by society and grief for all that they have lost while nobody seems to care and help.

Even though civilians might have an opinion, and ethical standpoint that is very different from those in politics who have the power to decide about war, even though people might oppose a war that soldiers are being sent to fight, and might resent to take personal responsibility for decisions that are being made, I feel that we still can’t brush of the responsibility to take charge of what happened.

I find it important that we don’t let our personal standpoint about war and warfare intrude upon and negate the deservingness of Veterans’ healing from trauma. We have to truly understand the power and importance of unconditional forgiveness and offer it freely, with an open heart and an open mind for the highest good of everyone involved. It is at the moment where we discover the source of unconditional forgiveness within us, that we understand the meaning and power of the soul. Forgiveness requires us to release the need for being right, the need for victory. Forgiveness welcomes back into life those who have been suffering from the war that we as a society have actively or passively ordered them to fight on our behalf.

Veterans share this kind of unconditional love and forgiveness with each other, as they understand that PTSD is a symptom of the soul. They share compassion and comfort in a way

that only Veterans can. They often just give each other a look, and the other person knows exactly what is meant. Through their experiences and trauma, they have an understanding of the soul that is very moving and overwhelming.

In my EFT work, I see more and more Vietnam Veterans standing up and asking for healing, so they can help their younger brothers and sisters from recent wars have a better life than they themselves had. There is so much caring and gentle understanding in this community that I feel encouraged to believe that we can see our work with EFT as a true door opener to forgiveness and healing of the symptoms of PTSD.

EFT responses

The results that I have been observing with EFT4Vets in the Veterans that I have worked with are quite encouraging:

I have seen significant sleep improvement even after the first tapping session, unless there is a physical reason interfering, like a poorly fitting mask for sleep apnea. The sleep usually stabilizes quickly in duration and quality. After releasing the feelings attached to specific traumatic events, we regularly see that intrusive thoughts and nightmares significantly decrease or disappear. If something still comes up, it becomes the topic of the next session. Once the memories and feelings associated with trauma that are causing the nightmares have been released with EFT, sleep usually improves even further and the bad dreams usually do not recur. Many Veterans also report an overall feeling of being more in control of themselves and their feelings and finding it easier to relate to others socially and emotionally. Some report more mental clarity and an increased ability to focus. They report physical improvements on many levels. These improvements are usually confirmed by their friends and spouses as well. The Veterans that I have monitored with PCL-M forms have shown scores below 50 on the PCL-M after 4-6 session hours, which supports even further, that they have significantly decreased their level of PTSD

None of my Veterans to date has reported any negative side effects from the EFT sessions.

Veterans' Case Studies

Since participating in a study of EFT for Veterans in San Francisco in March 2008, I have been working with many Veterans, mostly by phone. To be able to communicate the progress that Veterans can make with EFT, and in conjunction with Dawson Church, PhD (Church, 2007; web reference), I have used two standardized forms, the SA-45 and the PCL-M to monitor any shifts and progress that my Veterans are making with EFT. (These research tools are described briefly at the end of this article.) After signing an informed consent form, the Veterans that I work with are required to keep a daily sleep journal, which documents sleep duration, quality of sleep, overall wellbeing and other factors. It is my hope that the results of this research data will encourage and inspire others to move forward with the clinical, larger scale research studies that need to be done in this field.

The Association for Comprehensive Energy Psychology (ACEP) Research Committee has now targeted such larger scale research, and we can only hope that more and more support, financial and otherwise, will enable the committee to move forward with this important study. Once we are able to scientifically prove the benefits of EFT for Veterans with PTSD, we can trust that it will find its way into the Veteran Administration (VA) and other institutions and

healing offices quickly, as well as offer itself to Veterans and their families as a powerful self-help tool.

“Don” is 61 year old Vietnam Veteran, who has been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. We worked together for a total of six EFT session hours.

Since returning from Vietnam, Don did not have one night of uninterrupted sleep. He usually went to bed between 9:30pm and 10:30pm, and got up between 8:15am and 10:00am, feeling fatigued. In this 10-12 hour time period that he spent in bed, he was woken up by horrific nightmares at least twice per night. He never slept more than 1-2 hours at a stretch, and never more than 4-5 hours total – for forty years...

Our first session took only 20 minutes, as this was all that *“Don”* could handle that day., Before we started with EFT, he said his thoughts were like bumper cars, bouncing all over, but the tapping helped him relax and release the tension in his mind. It also stopped the tremors and shaking that are a symptom of Parkinson’s Disease. He tapped on finding peace with the war and peace with Vietnam. After this brief session, his sleep already greatly improved: He now slept 6-7 hours, woke up twice briefly, and felt rested instead of fatigued.

In our second session we worked through the traumatic memory of having shot someone’s arm off two weeks before he returned home from Vietnam. His sadness and guilt for the Vietnam soldier was overwhelming and had followed him for forty years. The Vietnamese had raised his weapon in front of him, and Don wasn’t sure if he wanted to give up or shoot at him, so he shot first. This happened two weeks before he was supposed to return home. We released the sadness using gentle EFT, and tapped on forgiveness.

In his email the morning after the session, Don reported: “Sleep is improving, no nightmares last night. My overall energy has been on an upswing. My hands still shake, but not as much, I’ve been tapping on the shakes and it seems to help. I think what we’ve worked on is quite amazing. Thanks, Don.

The third session dealt with a very traumatic event – his best friend, who usually walked to the left of Don, this time took his right side while scanning the jungle. When he got shot, Don felt that his friend had caught a bullet that was meant for him and never forgave himself for this. It didn’t matter that he received a bronze star for the dangerous rescue efforts that he made to save his friend’s life, Don felt that this was undeserved as he couldn’t save him, and after all these years still cried about the loss and guilt. The images of turning his friend, whom he loved like a brother, over, and seeing his head exploded, haunted him daily.

After using EFT on this memory, he realized that if he had caught the bullet, and his friend survived, he would have forgiven and released him a long time ago. He would never expect or want him to feel the way he felt himself. This realization allowed him to finally find peace, love and forgiveness.

In his email he wrote: “Thank you for today’s session, I feel much more at ease. I slept for two full hours after the session, a fairly sound sleep, I couldn’t believe that it was for two hours, it seemed like only minutes. Thank you again for all your help.....Don

Two days later, Don had an intense dream relating to the death of his father, who had killed himself while driving drunk when Don was eighteen. So we worked through his trauma, releasing pains and guilt he had carried for more than four decades.

Sleep:

By now, he was going to bed between 9:45 and 10:15, sleeping 7-8 hours, waking up briefly once or twice in between, but no more nightmares. He just rolled over, and went back to sleep. He woke up fairly refreshed between 7:30 and 8:15am. What an improvement for someone who had usually two serious nightmares each night and never got more than 4-5 hours!

In our fifth tapping session three days later, Don talked a lot about the improvements in his sleep and overall wellbeing. Then we tapped for the stress and feelings of lack of control resulting from the construction of his new home and people not doing what they were supposed to do. No more war memories came up for him! Reviewing his progress two weeks later, Don said, "I still think about Vietnam but it doesn't seem to bother me."

After 60 days, we did another session, and one more war memory came up: He had to identify comrades that had been killed and found in the jungle several days earlier. After tapping on all the aspects of what he saw and smelled and the disgust and nausea that he felt, he took a deep breath and stated: "Now the bad spirits are gone." He had felt as if these dead men had always been with him, somehow, weighing him down and taking his breath away. Now he reported that he felt as if a huge weight is lifted off him, and he can breathe and think clearly.

Don's voice has a very different sound now. It is clearer, lighter, and faster. There is less roughness and he laughs more. It is truly nice to hear the hope and confidence in his voice. His sleep has improved from getting 4-5 hours per night in a ten-hour time period, interrupted by an average of two nightmares, to getting an average of 7-8 hours with no nightmares.

Between the first session and his 30- and 60- day follow-ups, his total SA-45 score dropped gradually from 122 to 77 and his PCL-M score dropped from 65 to 34 after session 5, and remained there through the 30- and 60-day follow-ups.

He continues to tap on his Parkinson's symptoms to keep the shaking under control. His wife has noticed that he seems happier and relaxed. He feels comfortable socializing now, and is a true believer in EFT.

"*Joanna*" is a non-combat veteran with severe PTSD who has been on medical disability since 1993. In addition to her PTSD, Joanna suffered from severe Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and childhood sexual trauma. When Joanna agreed to try EFT, she did so out of a sense of desperation. Here is her personal report:

"I had already tried group counseling; PTSD awareness training; Veteran's Administration individual counseling for many years; Transcendental Meditation; metaphysical training (including candle magic, crystal and gemstone magic, and numerology); herbology and herbal remedies; Vimala Handwriting by Vimala Rogers; astrology; Native American healing beliefs; prescribed pharmaceuticals; Western medicine; chiropractic care; New Age healing techniques such as pendulum dowsing and chakra cleansing; University of

New Mexico PTSD Sleep Study and Nightmare Reduction; Veteran's Administration Group therapy many times; nutritional education; self-help books; and almost any other suggestion by any health care worker.

"I still couldn't fall asleep. I couldn't remain asleep without waking up repeatedly during the night. And I was plagued by repeated traumatic nightmares every night. Sleep was my enemy and I fought it every night, waking up exhausted and tired. I obsessed about sleep because I was always in sleep deficit. I would get very distressed if I stayed up late, yet couldn't seem to go to bed until late because I dreaded the nightmares. I wouldn't take naps during the day because it would make getting to sleep more difficult at night. The things that I tried helped very little.

"I gave EFT a chance and I was thrilled with the results. Within two sessions, I felt myself release all the associated trauma, emotions, and obsessions that interfered with my sleep. Sleep became an easy and gentle activity free from worry and fretting. No longer am I afraid of going to sleep or of even how much sleep I receive. Today I let my body tell me when to sleep instead of rigorously following a clock. Sleep today is a joy that refreshes my body and rejuvenates my soul. I wake up earlier than I used to and I need less sleep than before. Sometimes the associated old beliefs about sleep come up but now I utilize EFT to release them. Quick. Easy. Gentle. No more nightmares. No more fighting sleep."

Within ten days and four EFT sessions, "Joanna's SA-45 score fell from 162 before the first session to 97 after the last. Her PCL-M score fell from 76 to 47. Joanna and I will have some more cleanups to do in relation to her military experiences and the physical pain that she feels.

"*Jack*" is a 43-year-old Iraq Veteran who is now a fire fighter and ambulance driver. He frequently witnesses horrific events. Jack's sessions were different because he lives close enough to me to work in person instead of exclusively over the phone. Also, he very much wanted his wife to participate in some of his sessions, so that she would have a chance to get to understand him better.

When Jack received the SA-45 and PCL-M, he started off marking most of the questions a "1" or "2". However, about half way through, he realized that his actual intensity could be quite a bit higher. I see this very often with Veterans, and I think it is important to know for future research: Many Veterans have learned to cope with their trauma so well, that they put down the functionality of their coping mechanism instead of the actual intensity. So I frequently received the information: I could get very, very angry about this, a "5+", but I would never allow anybody to see that. So I put a "1" down, as I think I can handle my anger even though I feel it strongly.

We did three hours of couples counseling in the first session followed 11 days later by a 2.5-hour single session, and two days after that a 40-minute phone session which was recorded so that he could listen to it again while being away on drill. The last appointment was again a three hour couple's session in person.

Before his first session, Jack's SA-45 score was 138 points and his PCL-M score was 72. Eleven days after his introduction to EFT, his SA-45 score was 77 and his PCL-M score was 44. These are impressive results by any criteria. Jack's wife experienced similar improvements in her SA-45 scores, which went from 121 points to 84 after the first EFT couples session 11 days before. She continued to do EFT on her own, watching the DVDs and taking a class, and 72 days later, she scores at 77 on the SA-45.

Jack reported wonderful improvements in his sleep: He now usually sleeps through the night, whereas before he had only been able to sleep for two hours, then wake up startled and then doze until morning. In addition, Jack had another positive experience: Long before we started working together, he had been told that he wouldn't receive a long deserved promotion, as his commander found him too valuable in his current position as a cook and did not want to lose him. Even though his commander's decision was clear and firm, we tapped on it in our first session. Just a few weeks later, he reported that his commander was now willing to give him his promotion. He attributes this smilingly to EFT. They both have attended an EFT Level I class with me now and are tapping daily on various issues.

"Michael" is a Vietnam and Iraq Veteran who has been diagnosed with PTSD. In addition, he suffered from shaking hands, depression, lots of stress at home, and all kinds of issues stemming from childhood as well as being deployed in Vietnam and Iraq multiple times. In six sessions, approximately nine hours total, I helped him release some of his traumatic memories with EFT.

Michael's SA-45 score fell from 133 points to 104, and his PCL-M score fell from 59 points to 39. He has spread the word and is now getting his support group and counselor involved with EFT.

Spiritual Changes:

One of the most wonderful changes that I have witnessed in the Veterans mentioned here, as well as in the many others that I have worked with, is their growing trust and willingness to share and get involved in the healing of others. Most of my Veterans started off very reserved and private, and some had hardly any contact with the outside world. With no exception, they all, now are interested in helping others through their experiences. They find meaning in the sharing of their life lessons and want to spread the word about EFT and PTSD in whichever ways they can.

The caring for other Veterans, and the caring of the "older guys" the Vietnam Veterans over the "young kids" (the soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan) is so strong and powerful, that many of my Veterans have offered to be available as a resource for others who are just beginning their healing journey and are going through the same phases of doubt and fear. Through my website www.eft4vets.com, new Veterans and their families can now connect with others who have already experienced EFT, and will find compassionate, truly understanding ears to share their concerns with.

I find that, as soon as Veterans feel reconnected with themselves, their soul, their inner being, they begin to overflow with love and want to share their experiences and revelations with the world. As an EFT practitioner, it is humbling and overwhelming to be a part of this movement.

Follow-up and continued healing

Whenever possible, I follow up on my Veterans by phone or email even after our work together has finished. So far, I have seen the positive results that the Veterans achieved in our tapping

sessions have remained strong, even after sixty days and more. To ensure that this wonderful success continues to grow, I feel that regular support should be provided through supervised EFT groups, a potentially important yet inexpensive resource for Veterans.

These support groups for EFT should be supervised by EFT Practitioners who are specifically trained in group work using Borrowing Benefits and other EFT techniques. It is important that these practitioners are comfortable and experienced in leading a group through the tapping without running the risk of retraumatizing participants, or having Veterans tune into specific events before all participants are ready to do this. Ideally, some of these practitioners could also be recruited from those Veterans who have already undergone the EFT program for their own trauma, and are now able and ready to teach with insight and compassion, the way only Veterans can. My website will be a resource for those who want to get this specific training (www.eft4vets.com).

Reaching out to Veterans

Thomas Insel, head of the National Institute of Mental Health, reported at a news conference launching the American Psychiatric Association's 161st annual meeting: "Suicides and "psychological mortality" among US soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan could exceed battlefield deaths if their mental scars are left untreated.... Of the 1.6 million US soldiers who have been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, 18-20 percent - or around 300,000 - show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression or both," Insel also stated that "An estimated 70 percent of those at-risk soldiers do not seek help from the Department of Defense or the Veterans Administration." (AFP, web reference)

So even though the Department of Defense and the Veterans Association might not embrace our work just yet, there are still 70% of at risk soldiers who might not consider asking for help through them. Another study from the UK confirms that military peacekeepers would rather talk with their spouses and friends about their trauma than seek help from an institution (Greenberg, web reference).

When I first started this work, I believed that the best way to make EFT available to Veterans and their families must be to inform the VA, healing professionals who help Veterans, and Veterans organizations about the successes with EFT. I literally spent months giving EFT presentations at the VA in Vermont and National Guard here in New Hampshire, making phone call after phone call, and mailing out Gary Craig's "6 days at the VA" DVD, which features several very successful EFT sessions with Vietnam Veterans. I sent these to Vet Centers, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and other Veterans organizations. I tried whatever I could, and the feedback was kind and appreciative. But other than a few referrals, the doors stayed closed. This was a frustrating experience, which I know I share with other practitioners who have tried the same in their states.

Through my contacts within the military and the Veterans I had he worked with, I came to understand that the military is in many ways a closed community. It is very hard for a non-military person to get access to the VA. This is not because our methods aren't effective enough, but because the system is often not set up for quick change. So I decided that if I wanted to help Veterans, it was best not to go through the VA at this time, but to find veterans who are open to EFT, and help them release their traumatic experiences. Then they can talk to others about it, including their physician and therapist at the VA, and the word will spread quickly from within.

However, even if the doors at the VA remain closed for a while, and even if they cannot be more open to new techniques right now, we have to remind ourselves not to fall back on the old thought patterns of war, which look for the people to blame things on, instead of seeing that we all have the same moral and spiritual responsibility to help Veterans and their families heal in whichever way we can.

In summary

Helping Veterans heal from PTSD and the trauma of war is very personal, very powerful and very transforming work. It is truly a spiritual path for the Veterans, their families and as well as for the practitioner. When we offer EFT to Veterans and their families outside of the VA structure, we are then able to explore what truly works for the individual, how Veterans feel that we can help the best, and how we can get access to soldiers to offer healing in respectful, appropriate, and successful manners. This is in many ways new territory, and it is wonderful to be able to be flexible and learn from every new client we help. I see this as a wonderful challenge that will allow each of us to take our part and develop our possibilities and responsibilities towards the healing from war and reconnecting with what has never been separated - even though we may not yet be completely aware of this reality. It is a joy and honor and a blessing to be able to do this work.

I have a dream... I see the victims of war, including the Veterans and their families all around the world, are standing up and beginning to teach and offer healing to their comrades from war, their families, and society at large...

Explanation of assessment tools

The SA-45 is a brief psychological symptom checklist, yielding measures of overall and symptom domain-specific levels of distress. Clients are asked to rate each of the 45 items on a five-point severity scale, ranging from (1) "Not at all", to (5) "Extremely". The nine SA-45 measures are:

Anxiety, Depression, Hostility, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Obsessive Compulsivity, Paranoid Ideation, Phobic Anxiety, Psychoticism, Somatization

The PTSD Checklist – Military Version (PCL-M)

This form is used by the military to diagnose PTSD. Veterans are asked to rate each of the 17 items on a five-point severity scale, ranging from (1) "Not at all", to (5) "Extremely". An added score of 50 or above is considered PTSD.

This tool is available for free online.

References

- AFP, May 5, 2008. www.afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5haw8YXBxzhjjPObm6mQW0hkrM8-Q
- Agence France-Presse (AFP). Soldier suicides could trump war tolls: US health official, May 5th 2008
http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5goRExHRq_e9fV4CTqb_KQOIAITsQ
- CBS News, Suicide Epidemic Among Veterans: A CBS News Investigation Uncovers A Suicide Rate For Veterans Twice That Of Other Americans
http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/13/cbsnews_investigates/main3496471.shtml
- Church, Dawson PhD: *The Genie in your Genes Epigenetic Medicine and the New Biology of Intention*, Santa Rosa, CA: Elite Books 2007.
- Church, Dawson: <http://www.soulmedicineinstitute.org/www.stressproject.com>
- Cantrell, Bridget C, PhD and Dean, Chuck: *Down Range, to Iraq and back*. Seattle, WA: WordSmith Publishing 2005.
- Craig, Gary: www.emofree.com
- Greenberg, Neil: Do military peacekeepers want to talk about their experiences? Perceived psychological support of UK military peacekeepers on return from deployment
<ftp://ftp.rta.nato.int/PubFullText/RTO/MP/RTO-MP-HFM-134/MP-HFM-134-22.pdf>
- Kautto, Randy: www.soldiersheart.net October 2006
- Lipton, Bruce H. PhD: *The Biology of Belief*, Mountain of Love/Elite Books March 18, 2005.
- McFall, E.Everett: I can still hear their cries, even in my sleep: A journey into PTSD. Outskirts Press May 19, 2007.
- Meager, Ilona: *Moving a nation to care – post-traumatic stress disorder and America's returning troops*, Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing 2007.
- Nhat Hanh, Thich.: *Love in action*, Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press 1993, p. 88.
- Tick Edward, PhD: *War and the soul: Healing our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, Wheaton, IL: Quest Books 2005.

Life coach **Ingrid Dinter, EFT ADV**, is the owner of HEALING NOW in Hopkinton, NH. As the daughter of a WWII Veteran, she specializes in helping Veterans and their families heal from the trauma of war with Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT).

Ingrid has been an EFT practitioner for more than six years. She has studied and filmed EFT with Gary Craig the founder of EFT, and others. Ingrid co-moderates the original EFT forums for Trauma and PTSD and the EFT Professionals forum. She has contributed to Gary Craig's Newsletter, and numerous other publications about EFT for Veterans and given radio interviews and presentations to military and non-military organizations and institutions about this topic.

Ingrid is a passionate teacher of EFT beginner and advanced seminars. She is an Interfaith Minister and a registered, alternative provider with the NH Board for Mental Health Practice. The board has no oversight over her practice. Ingrid is also a Reiki Master, Teacher, a Level III Reconnective Healing practitioner, and Registered Yoga teacher. Ingrid is available as public speaker and offers specialized EFT seminars for healing professionals about using EFT for war trauma. She is available for group work and private sessions in person and over the phone.

Contact:

Ingrid Dinter

<http://www.eftcoach.us/>

www.eft4vets.com



TERMS OF USE

The International Journal of Healing and Caring On Line is distributed electronically. You may choose to print your downloaded copy for relaxed reading.

We encourage you to share this article with friends and colleagues.

The International Journal of Healing and Caring – On Line

P.O. Box 502, Medford, NJ 08055

Phone (866) 823-4214 (519) 265-0746

Email: center@ijhc.org Website: <http://www.ijhc.org>

Copyright © 2008 IJHC. All rights reserved.