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Healing the Memories

Every South African has been hurt and damaged by apartheid and because of this, it is important for all of us to be healed. For healing to start to take place, South Africans need to remember their hurts, tell their stories and be accepted and respected and listened to. We also need to listen to each other to get the process of healing started.

Listening is a gift we can give to other people. It is an act of hospitality. It provides someone with a space in which to feel welcome and safe - a space where he / she can be listened to and heard. *“Healing means the creation of an empty but friendly space where individuals can tell their story to someone who can really listen with real attention”* (Henri Nouwen)

This healing helps us to create a new life for all of us. We all have a story to tell. It is a story of what we did, what was done to us and what we failed to do through the years of our life here together. Many of these years were apartheid years. If we are to put these years behind us and move forward without becoming prisoners of pain and anger and bitterness, we need to establish the truth about our history.

Background Information

History is about story-telling - about laying bare the stories of our past so that we can build a society on mutual trust and understanding and move with hope towards a peaceful future. We need clear pictures of each other. We need to know what we each think and believe and hope and feel. Friendship cannot be founded on prejudice.

A Healing of Memories workshop is an individual and collective journey of exploring the effects of the apartheid years on ourselves and on each other. We deal with these issues on an emotional, psychological and spiritual level, rather than an intellectual level. It provides us with a unique opportunity to examine and explore our individual journey while sharing with others in theirs.

Time is given for individual reflection, creative exercises and opportunities to share in small groups. There is also time to reflect on common themes that come up in our journeys - themes like anger, hope, hatred, joy, isolation, guilt, endurance and a discovery of the common humanity we share. The workshop reaches its climax in the creation of a liturgy / celebration which provides a sense of completion to the workshop.

Healing memories does not mean that we forget the past, but rather try to find a way of no longer allowing our memories to paralyse or destroy us. We need to keep that which is life-giving and put behind us all that is destructive. We need to find ways of preventing our history from being repeated and of breaking the cycle of victims and perpetrators that we have lived with for

so long. These workshops can assist victims to become victors and can help all of us on the road to a new life by creating a sense of community across the usual barriers which divide us such as racism, sexism, classism, age-ism, able-ism, politics, language and others.

Workshop Structure

Each workshop takes place over three days starting on the evening of the first day and ending on the afternoon of the third day. Each workshop is a complete journey in itself and it is therefore important to be present for the whole time.

The Narrative Approach

The narrative approach to healing is concerned with people participating together in suffering and through the process becoming part of the ability to bring about transformation through the re-interpretation of their life stories through meaningful relationships.

The narrative approach allows for the undoing of the enormously harmful effects of silence and violence upon groups of people. When others talk about victims, the victims are rendered powerless and unable to move on.

Narrative work involves working with language and with the witnessing of trauma, whether current or historic, until the participants are able to move into more empowered witnessing positions at which point the past no longer determines a repetitive cycle for the future.

In a narrative- based workshop, such as the Healing of Memories workshop, many different stories are reclaimed - often 'dominant' stories of pain and suffering and of being victims to regimes of violence, but also other stories - stories of gentleness and resilience; stories of survival and respectful practices that tell of 'heroic stories'. These are also remembered and celebrated and enable people to commit to ethical practices that are not driven by hatred of the 'other' or un-heard 'rage'.

These workshops go beyond addressing only the 'victim' side of our descriptions of ourselves. They look also into understanding that a person who remains mis-understood, not acknowledged, dis-empowered and un-heard, becomes in danger of being a perpetrator.

True empowerment and healing arises when people are able to dialogue with each other and move into re-defining their roles and their identities within society.

Khulumani Support Group welcomes all South Africans to join survivors in the journey of finding each other in our stories as we move towards building a nation in which each is valued for his / her uniqueness and diversity becomes our strength.

Issued by Marjorie Jobson, Chairperson of the Board, Khulumani Support Group