

Being Me

Healing your Attachment Wounds
and Becoming Whole

Maree B. Even

MBE Psychology Publishing

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For ALL of you

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Preface

After many years of assisting others in their therapeutic journey, my own unfinished psychological business started to call me with greater insistence. Over the years I had done sessions with a few different therapists, but this time I knew I was ready for something deeper. I rang a psychodynamic psychotherapist my friend had recommended, and thus began my five-and-a-half-year therapeutic journey. It was midway during this process that I started to write this book.

I began to wonder about the path of therapy, healing or repair. I was an insider on the journey and wanted to understand the process I was undertaking. And being a psychotherapist myself, I wanted to have greater clarity about what would benefit the people that came to see me.

I also think this question, about the path of therapy, was sparked as a result of my experience as a meditation practitioner. I had been practicing meditation in the Buddhist tradition for many years. Here there is a path, or numerous paths depending on which school of Buddhism you follow, to becoming more “Awake”. These paths have been handed down from teacher to student for thousands of years; they are well trodden and mapped out for the dedicated practitioner. Although the path of becoming more spiritually awake is not mutually exclusive to the path of healing our psychological wounds, there are important differences.

I became curious. Are there similar paths for psychological

growth and becoming more whole as a person? And more specifically, are there paths for healing our attachment wounds which affect our sense of self and the way we function in relationships and the world? This curiosity was the spark to begin writing this book.

It has taken me three years to craft this written work. Just as my journey of *becoming* fully human will continue throughout my life, I hope what I have written is not seen as definitive, but something which remains alive and grows with each person who reads it.

Interestingly, upon completion of this book, the following question arose in my mind: If I needed to trek through the Amazon Jungle, who would I want as my guide? Someone indigenous to this forest, or a Harvard Professor who had spent their lifetime studying it. It's taken me a little while to contemplate this question, but I think I have my answer for now. If it was someone indigenous, I would want them to have knowledge of how to guide someone who is unfamiliar with this forest. If it was the Harvard Professor, I would want them to have personally undertaken the trek.

I tell this story, as throughout writing this book I utilised both subjective (i.e. the indigenous person) and objective (i.e. the Harvard Professor) points of view. Subjectively, I remembered and noticed my own experience of healing and growth, as well as that of others I've had the privilege to guide on their journey. Objectively, I researched and read what others in the psychological sciences and neurosciences had found and thought. Including both viewpoints, I think, has contributed to a richer and more whole perspective which could not have been achieved with either one on its own.

I have written this book as a journey we are taking together as fellow human beings. There are three parts.

Part I is the beginning. It includes the underlying concepts, theories and framework for this journey of healing your attachment wounds and becoming whole.

Part II is the main road. I have divided this section into four phases of psychological development. In each phase, I describe what a child needs from their early attachment relationships to grow into a secure and whole person. I then discuss what can occur, to your sense of self and your experience of relationship, if you didn't get some of these needs met in a "good enough" way. Most importantly, I illuminate a path of repair, so you may heal your wounds of attachment and become a person who feels more secure, connected, real and whole.

Part III is the final section of this expedition. It describes three guidelines; emotion, relationship and time. I have used these as the major guiding principles which underlie this psychological work. Knowing and heeding these will assist you on this therapeutic journey.

The path to healing and becoming whole is a step by step exploration and discovery, with many twists and turns. Since at times it can feel like you are navigating your way in the dark, it is my sincere hope that this book shed some light on your journey.

THE JOURNEY OF HEALING AND BECOMING WHOLE CAN
BE CHALLENGING. WE CONFRONT OUR DARKEST DEMONS,
LEAP ACROSS CHASMS WE THOUGHT WE COULD NOT
CROSS AND COME HOME TO PLACES INSIDE OURSELVES WE
NEVER KNEW WERE THERE. IT TAKES COURAGE TO STEP
ONTO THIS PATH, AND EVERY SINGLE BIT OF OUR
STRENGTH TO KEEP GOING.



PART I

Introduction

Our childhood is supposed to be a time of safety, protection, nurturing, exploration and growth. It is a time when we are fully dependent on those that brought us into the world, to provide this for us. This care giving, usually happens in a way which is “good enough”. This is a term coined by Donald Winnicott, describing a parent who is devoted enough to take care of their baby and child, in a way which is attuned to their needs at each stage of development.ⁱ

Statistically the majority of children have received this “good enough” parenting; at least 50% and possibly as much as 70%. In the remaining cases however, something goes awry, and the child does not get what they need to develop and grow into a psychologically healthy and mature individual. These are the children this book is primarily dedicated to. We are adults now, but still we may hold this legacy in our hearts; unless further along in our development as grown children, adolescents or adults, we experienced at least one relationship where we felt safe, supported, cared about and free to express our authentic self. Again, the benefits here occur when the relationship has been “good enough”.

ⁱ Donald Winnicott was particularly concerned with mothers as it was the 1960’s, when mothers were usually the primary caregivers. Today however, although mothers are often this in the beginning, the father (or other support person) may also take on this role early on. I will therefore say parent or caregiver.

Interestingly, relationships in childhood do not need to perfectly meet all our requirements for us to grow in a psychologically healthy way. In fact, not only is this impossible, but also undesirable. Age-appropriate challenge and frustrations allows us the opportunity to build resilience, reduce illusions about reality and grow to engage in reciprocal relationships.

A bit like an elastic band being stretched, failures in relationship are okay, to a certain degree, as a child can assimilate the resultant frustration and disappointment. This frustration and disappointment must be developmentally appropriate, titrated and experienced as tolerable, to then result in the positive outcomes suggested. When the failures in relationship are outside the child's developmental capability, too big or too continuous, the positive outcomes will not be realised. A little like an elastic band stretched too far will eventually break, a child cannot learn from frustrations and disappointments which result in intolerable emotional arousal (Schoore, 2012).

A core aspect of life is relationship, in every form. The way we engage and disengage in these relationships is heavily determined by both our innate tendencies (such as temperament) and our lived experience in relationship. Our earliest connections (i.e. with our caregivers) have a profound impact (Schoore, 2012). This is when we implicitly learn what it means to be a human in connection (or disconnection) with another.

If our relationships early in life are “good enough”, we grow with a sense of security and trust, knowing we, others and the world are generally okay. Our relationships become a means of connection, belonging, warmth, support, enjoyment, growth and reciprocity of needs being met.

However, if early in life our relationships are not “good

enough”, our experience of self, others and the world will be quite different. We may grow experiencing our self and relationships as unimportant, all-consuming or a source of pain. Relationships become something we defend against, feel preoccupied with, or protect ourselves from, and so we generally find it difficult to feel secure and satisfied. Considering the very essence of life and being human is about connection, feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction within our self and our relationships is an enormous loss, and profoundly affects our time on earth.

There will be many among us who resonate with this sense of insecurity, and yearn for fulfilment within our self, our relationships and our life. If we relate to these feelings, we may need to devote energy and purpose into examining and repairing this insecurity and lack of wholeness. However, in saying this, all of us to some extent have parts of our self that require this examination and repair. Some of us will have it to a greater extent, while others will have it to a lesser extent. Even though the degree of work that needs to be done will differ amongst us, we are ALL called to do this work; sharing this journey of discovering our full human beingness.

In writing, I hold a candle of hope so we may ALL reclaim our wholeness. In this journey, we are called to heal our wounds of disconnection and claim back forgotten parts of ourselves. Then as we walk this earth in connection with all that is inside us and all that is outside us, we come to know what it truly means to be alive.

“THE GREATEST HAZARD OF ALL, LOSING ONE’S SELF, CAN OCCUR VERY QUIETLY IN THE WORLD, AS IF IT WERE NOTHING AT ALL. NO OTHER LOSS CAN OCCUR SO QUIETLY; ANY OTHER LOSS – AN ARM, A LEG, FIVE DOLLARS, A WIFE, ETC, - IS SURE TO BE NOTICED.”
Soren Kierkegaard In *The Sickness Unto Death*. Kierkegaard’s Writings Vol19