

A Buddhist Perspective on Trauma: Understanding, Forgiveness, and Atonement

Barbara Wright, Ph.D.¹
(Bodhicari Mettavihari)

Introduction

Over the centuries, a great deal of material has been written about the destruction, sorrow, suffering, and trauma that are experienced as the consequences of war, abuse, illness, crime, family strife, etc., and how it disenfranchises us from one another, drives us into emotional isolation, and makes us appear as less than human in the eyes of the other, be it the victim or the perpetrator. These roles of victim and perpetrator can be assumed by individuals, families, cultures, races, religions, political ideologies, and nations. They persist until there is a clear understanding and acceptance or Right View of what has transpired. Until this is achieved, they always leave those involved outside the oneness of humanity, and under the cloud of pervasive fear.

My first intention in writing this paper is to explore with the Metta Map how the Buddhist Principles of Right View and overcoming ignorance are critical in the treatment of trauma. My second intention in writing this paper is to explore how our heart, our humanity, must be opened to all parties in this process of recovery if it is to be successful. My third intention in writing this paper is to explore the integrated mental, emotional, and energetic transformations that occur when reconciliation moves into atonement through Right Action.

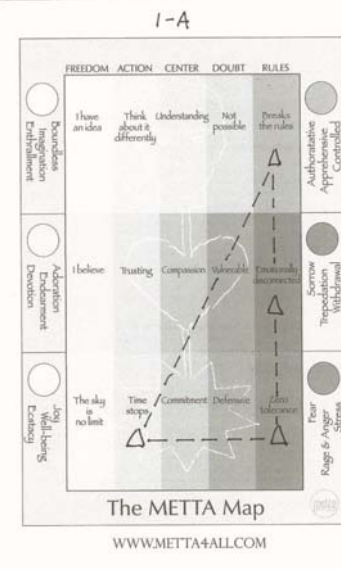
As we traverse the squares of the Metta Map we will explore the multi-dimensional phenomena of the neurology and physiology of the body, and the mental and emotional releases that are concurrent in the process of healing. This is a transformational progression, and is the key to releasing trauma and elevating the individual to a new state of being.

This paper will demonstrate how the Metta Map can be a monitoring device for seeing clearly where one is in regards to staying on the Noble Eightfold Path, and a useful vehicle for both victims and perpetrators who wish to be released from the Triangle of Trauma (see illustration).

Trauma, as we are using the term, is expressed on the Metta Map when a *triangle of events* is experienced as frozen, and is anchored in the square of “Time Stops.” Tragedy and trauma become fixed in time through a variety of triangular configurations and combinations of squares on the Metta Map. By “anchor” we mean that the common denominator of any “triangle of trauma” is “Time Stops.”

¹ Draft edited by Dr. Stephen Long (Bodhicari Dharmapala)

Illustration: Triangle of Trauma



Foundation of the Metta Map

The Metta Map was developed during my thirty-year career as a clinical psychologist and Buddhist practitioner. The intention of the Metta Map is to provide a multi-dimensional tool for exploring and experiencing various elements of the Dharma in a multitude of applications.

The Metta Map has been used in a variety of conflict resolution scenarios, including corporate, academic, judicial, family therapy, individual, youth gangs, populations with chemical dependencies, and others. The Metta Map has also been used effectively with these populations in relationship to their perceived traumas and tragedies – versus situational challenges, which are also created through perception.

In this paper, therefore, we will define “trauma” in two separate ways: firstly, as the sudden and abrupt assault on an individual, family, or organizational system such as an extended family, a business, a city, or a government. This can come in the form of an auto accident, a personal attack such as rape, a fatal illness, the loss of a business, home, or life savings, or a military invasion.

The second definition, and the one most often neglected, is the insidious, prolonged insult and assault with a cumulative and deleterious effect, to an individual, family, or system. For the individual, this can come in the form of chronic neglect, domestic violence and abuse, protracted poverty, or chronic illness. For the group it can be the result of corruption in a corporate or governmental system that erodes the spirit of its community, or the occupation of a foreign invading military force. Furthermore, in this second definition it is at the unique moment when the accumulation of this unwelcome intruder or collection of intruders reaches the nexus breaking point for the individual, family, or system that it actually becomes trauma or tragedy. In Buddhist language, the circumstance has mutated from the impermanent process of normal life to a fixed sensation induced by the delusion of permanent reality.

The body of my presentation will explore how the Metta Map provides victims of both of these kinds of trauma and their coaches with the methodology for using it as tool to diminish the consequences of trauma, and to provide a path out of – or at least toward reducing – suffering. In the tradition of Buddhist Psychology, the signature elements of

intention, impermanence, and compassion have been effectively incorporated into the Metta Map for use as a platform for teaching and transmitting the Dharma, as well as for mitigating the effects of negative life events. The goal is to maintain the awareness and presence to life's challenging circumstances, and to prevent falling into the abyss of a fixed negative life orientation, which then becomes the focus of identification as "self." For example, if one asks the question, "Who are you?" the answer might be: "I am a rape victim"; "I am a tsunami victim"; "I am a cancer patient"; "I am a refugee." In these identifications the person has lost the multi-dimensional reality of their humanity, and has attached themselves to the toxic or negative situation in which they find themselves – even though it is only one aspect of the whole individual.

While using the Metta Map, we identify three forms of intelligence. Intelligence, as described in this system, is the way one takes in, processes, and expresses information.

First, there is the level of Mind Intelligence, which is characterized by the cognitive manipulation of ideas and constructs that are intellectually received and processed, and are attached to ego. The knowledge of the mind is the essence of our shared reality. (e.g. "We are all sitting in a large room.")

Second, there is the level of Heart Intelligence, which is characterized by emotional knowledge, the expression of which is energetically greater than intellectual knowledge. Heart Intelligence is the essence of our humanity. (e.g. "Some of us may feel lost in a large room, and others may take comfort feeling the sense of community.")

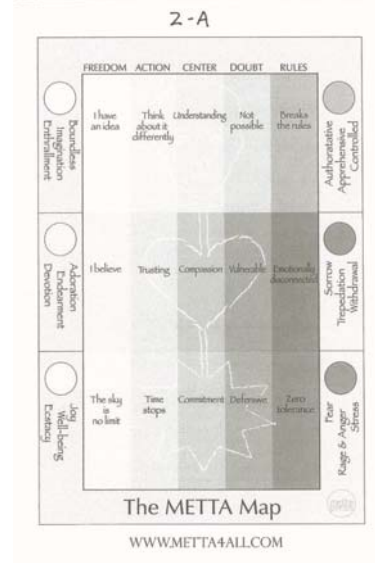
Third, there is the level of Energetic Consciousness Intelligence, which is primal imprinted knowledge, the experience prior to language, the foundation of our experience, imagination, intuition, and the engine that empowers action, both internal and external. Energetic Consciousness Intelligence is the essence of desire and creativity, and is the repository of karma. (e.g. "Being in this room is a physical expression of my conscious and pre-conscious commitments.")

When using the Metta Map, the intention is to illustrate how the person sees him or herself in all Three Levels of Intelligence at that moment in time. The next step is to address the Map with a precise intention related to how or where they would ideally like to be on the Map. It is with this intention that the individual navigates the Metta Map, either on their own or with the assistance of a mentor or coach. The goal is to chart the path out of their current circumstance or identity and to move towards their preferred place or condition. In doing so, it is important to keep the Buddha's Precept of not doing harm to one's self or others, and to utilize Right Speech while expressing one's self on the Map. In this process we are cultivating Right View by getting more clarity and preparing for Right Action, which develops "Success by Approximation" while moving through the issues at hand. In doing so, one will be more skillful dealing with conflicts, both internal and external, thereby reducing stress levels, suffering, or traumatic conditions that inhibit the spaciousness of thought and emotion. This skillfulness increases the array of possibilities for a more desirable outcome.

The Metta Map is a sacred tool. When we use it, we need to approach it with purity of mind as well as a commitment to letting the process reveal the truth of the issue we seek to understand. Through this process we seek a reduction, resolution, or reconciliation to any identified conflict or trauma.

The structure of The Metta Map is framed in a vertical and horizontal matrix with the Three Levels of Intelligence displayed on the vertical grid. This matrix of activity exists in a continual horizontal, vertical, and spatial flow. It is like looking at a three-dimensional chess board or a cube.

Illustration: The Metta Map



The horizontal components of the matrix are: Freedom, Action, Center, Doubt, and Rules. They represent a continuum that flows from left to right, and also from right to left. This flow expresses the movement of intelligence, with its five gradients, from a state of freedom and the absence of fear to one of constraint and rules driven by and sustained by fear. The flow of the levels on the Metta Map can move in all directions, with the degrees of attachment to each square profoundly affecting the relationship an individual has to the situation or problem at hand. This attachment gives a dimension of depth to the square, which we may refer to in either percentages or degrees. One's relationship to each square can be either positive or negative, depending on perception.

While looking at the Metta Map, the squares on the top, or Mind Level of Intelligence, are "I Have an Idea," which represents Freedom of thought. "Thinking About It Differently" is the Action of expressing that freedom. The Center, "Understanding," reflects the knowledge of the idea and of how to think about it differently, and then the caution or Doubt that exists as we move toward the right hand side into the square of "Not Possible." When we get to the Rules column we reach "Rules," which like every square can be either positive or negative; there are rules that are enduring and reliable, and there are rules that have become obsolete and restrictive.

When we come to the middle level of Heart Intelligence we start with the uninhibited state of the Freedom square of "I Believe." From this we move to the Action square, which is "Trusting." The Center of the Map is "Compassion," which moves into "Vulnerable" through Doubt or caution. On the far right side we find the square of "Emotionally Disconnected," which is that state when the heart moves into the Rules of fear. This may seem un-Metta-like; however, the wisdom of the heart is that there are times that in order to get Right View one must temporarily emotionally disconnect – not a place to stay too long, but sometimes necessary.

On the lowest row of the Metta Map, which is the Energetic Consciousness Level of Intelligence, the square on the far left in the Freedom column is when the energy is unbound and "The Sky is No Limit." You know you're there because in Action "Time Stops." The Center square is "Commitment," and the degree of commitment you have to

anything is the engine, or the amount of energy you have that drives the whole process. When in Doubt, one enters the “Defensive” square, and when moving into the Rules of fear we reach the square of “Zero Tolerance.”

Please note that the degree of commitment is represented by a three-dimensional or “depth” phenomenon/element to the Metta Map. This is the level of attachment one has to any of the squares – from very little at 1%, to trauma at 70%, to total clinging at 100%. The more attachment one has, the greater the suffering; this can range from a mild annoyance or irritation to a major sense of loss or sorrow. This might be likened to the Buddha’s discussions about “extremes,” and avoiding them. We will demonstrate how this depth effect influences the severity of trauma that is experienced.

The Four Noble Truths, the Metta Map, and Trauma

The Buddha’s First Noble Truth states that suffering (or stress) is an inevitable fact of life. The Second Noble Truth tells us that desire or attachment (or its opposite, aversion) is the cause for all suffering. The Third Noble Truth informs us that there is a way to free ourselves from suffering.

In terms of the Metta Map, we cognitively *understand* that some kind of stress is going to come into our lives no matter what, and with that there will be some degree of suffering. This is the First Noble Truth.

We use the term “Relative Continuum of Stress” to describe the spectrum of suffering we humans encounter that range from minimal to maximum, from one extreme to the other. It goes from “A fly just landed on my arm” or “I don’t have the right shade of shoes” – to “My son was just killed in Afghanistan” or “My twelve-year-old daughter was kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery.” This continuum is always subjective, and also applies to “I have a headache” all the way up to “I am paralyzed from the waist down,” which is traumatic. In actuality, there is always something more on both ends of the spectrum; the experience can always be either mild or severe because stress is relative.

In addition, what we consider to be traumatic at one time in our lives (“I didn’t get the job!”) can become completely irrelevant later on (as the eighty-year-old when she says, “Oh! I wish I could be sixty again!”). Stress is never permanent, whereas one can stay fixed in trauma for the duration of this lifetime. The Buddha said that suffering or stress is related to aging, sickness, and death (and the other clingings and aversions listed above in the First Noble Truth). Each of these stressors is inevitable, and any of them can lead to trauma; how successfully we manage them determines our quality of life, and our movement on the path to enlightenment.

One is never able to truly evaluate where another stands on the Relative Continuum of Stress. Looking from the outside, the trust-fund child appears to have it made; he is set up financially for life, and never has to work for a living. These individuals are oftentimes the objects of envy by people who have less. What can’t be seen from the outside, however, is that from the inside, any person without wholesome direction, purposefulness, and a meaningful life, entitled or not, can experience anguish and emotional isolation that can cripple or destroy him.

On the other hand, one may see an ordinary, mundane person and feel pity for him because he appears to have very little. But internally this person may experience meaning and purpose in his life, so that even with outward struggles there is joy and satisfaction. External circumstances often signify nothing; appearances can be deceiving. In my clinical practice I have had the opportunity to treat many young “trust-fund” adults who were in an existential crisis of meaninglessness, and who fell into drug addiction and suicidal ideation. I have also treated young “trust fund” adults who were struggling as to

how to be generous and still maintain a skillful management of their family's estate. With regards to material wealth, there is no predicting how it will turn out. It is the individual's cultivation of the Dharma that reduces one's position on the Relative Continuum of Stress (or trauma) as he or she systematically eliminates attachments by progressing on the path.

Using the Metta Map we see that stress, suffering, or trauma is a possibility that can exist in any of the fifteen squares. Just because "*I have an idea*," "*I believe*," and "*the sky is the limit*" are on the side of the Map representing *freedom*, don't be tempted to think that standing on these squares guarantees a free pass from suffering. There can be just as much suffering from having too much freedom (anarchy) as there can be from having too many *rules* (oppression).

At some point in our lives – oftentimes on a daily or even an hourly basis – there are situations in which we find ourselves experiencing *doubt (not possible)*, *fear (rules)*, anxiety, *vulnerability*, *defensiveness*, *emotional disconnection*, or even *zero tolerance*. Each of these is a stressor and can be a source of trauma: whether it is going to work in traffic, having a boss who doesn't understand, or an employee who doesn't get the job done; spouses who don't listen, taking care of sick children or parents, or not being able to afford a new car or food. Taking any scenario to the extreme, it could be: receiving orders in a combat zone that involve the inevitable result of "collateral damage," which is the killing of innocent civilians; being driven from your home, as in Rwanda, and losing everything; or facing a child with a terminal illness. The list is endless. By acknowledging the existence of stress or suffering one then has the capacity to examine its source. Notice that these stressors occur on all *three levels of intelligence*: mind, heart, and energetic consciousness; either one at a time, in some combination, or perhaps all at the same time.

When we study the Metta Map we discover that a primary source of suffering comes from having *rules* about the way things should be – or shouldn't be. This leads us to the Second Noble Truth, which names desire or attachment as the origin of suffering; this means not having what we want, or not wanting what we have. Any time we feel less-than or deprived or in-want-of we are trapped in desire. If you notice, at any given moment there will usually be a certain feeling of "unsatisfactoriness" about the way things are; there is always something missing, or too much of something that doesn't match up to our expectations. All of these are impermanent conditions of suffering or stress, and can become the seeds of trauma.

Studying and using the Metta Map we discover that there is a way out of our suffering: the Third Noble Truth. This is not just a false hope; this is a promise. It is through introspective investigation that we come to an *understanding* about the nature of our expectations. Through this inquiry we seek to develop skillfulness, *compassion*, and equanimity while moving from square to square on the Metta Map. We discover that suffering can be, in fact, a gift which propels us to be courageous and imaginative in our inquiry, and keeps us seeking a way out until we find relief. It is with these qualities that we cultivate insight through our *three levels of intelligence* – always coming back to our intention. Having access to the Buddha's Middle Path of *understanding*, *compassion*, and *commitment*, represented by the Center vertical column of squares, we can successfully traverse all of the squares as needed in the moment.

From the Buddhist Catechism by Col. H. S. Olcott, the Buddha divides Bodhisattas (spiritual aspirants on the path to liberation) into three categories that fit perfectly within the Metta Map system: "he who attains least quickly is guided by intelligence (*mind*); he who attains less quickly is guided by faith (*heart*); and he who attains quickly takes the course of energetic action (*energetic consciousness*)". In regards

to these three, Col. H. S. Olcott said, “The first is guided by intelligence and does not hasten; the second is full of faith, and does not care to take the guidance of wisdom; and the third never delays to do what is good. Regardless of the consequences to himself, he does it when he sees that it is best that it should be done.”(1)

The first aspirant develops least quickly because he is limited by only cognitive information, and does not access data coming in through the channels of heart and energetic consciousness. The second aspirant develops less quickly because he is limited by beliefs, and he ignores information coming in through the mind and his intuitive channels. The third aspirant demonstrates the power of *wholesome* intention, which is the pre-verbal, driving force of the entire path; he has successfully integrated all three levels of intelligence in order to act appropriately and effectively in the moment, and he is unattached to the delusionary spell of ego, whether it be driven by mind or faith.

Let’s pause for a moment, breathe, and explore some of these insights on the Metta Map.

Looking at the First Noble Truth, we see that *rules* often make us view things as *not possible*, which can perpetuate stress and lead to trauma. When one goes into *understanding* he or she might be able to *think about things differently*, which can raise the possibility of reducing the stress. Keep in mind that many *rules* are narrow and restrictive, therefore, they cause stress. It is only by broadening one’s limited thinking that new information can arrive and lead to a *new idea*, which may offer relief for the stressful situation.

We will find through *understanding* that there are *rules* that are skillful and helpful, while there are others that have out-lived their usefulness. For example, the *rule* that a four-year-old child can’t cross the street by himself may be limiting to the child, but it is there for the child’s safety. An adult, however, is perfectly capable of crossing the street alone, so this *rule* has become obsolete for the adult. In the case of the child, this *rule* might cause situational stress, but to the parent it is a comfort. In other words, *rules* are generally relative depending on setting, context, and wisdom.

An *understanding* that suffering or stress is inevitable can lead to *compassion* for yourself and others. Knowing that all sentient beings share in this phenomenon, the delusion that it is only you that is suffering disappears; this can be a great relief. In fact, how you relate to the universality of suffering determines the degree of acceptance you can have of the suffering you encounter, as well as the suffering of others. Acceptance at that moment is an empowerment to creativity, and has nothing to do with tolerating or condoning unwholesome situations. Although some unskillful interpretations of the concept of acceptance are fatalistic, acceptance, the way we are describing it here, is not fatalistic because it takes into account the impermanent nature of all circumstances. There’s an old saying in many parts of the world, “If you wait five minutes the weather will change.” The fact is: change is ever present. It is the same with suffering. “This too shall pass.”

The Fourth Noble Truth is the pathway out of suffering: the Noble Eightfold Path. It is the integration and inter-connectedness of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path and the fifteen squares of the Metta Map, along with the fluidity of the Metta process itself that allows for the continual movement of catching and releasing, and identifying and understanding, in our forward movement on the path of liberation.

Intention, or “free will expressed,” is core to the entire Metta system, and permeates our exploration of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Mastery of each of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path will be experienced as an alignment in the Center Column of the Metta Map, which is our goal. Therefore, a thorough cultivation of *understanding*, *compassion*, and *commitment* is

required in order for the eight components of the Noble Eightfold Path to be realized and become fully integrated in our lives. Please observe that all of these include the critical elements of Wisdom (*Panna* – Right View, Right Intention), Virtue or Ethical Conduct (*Sila* – Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood), and Energy Concentration (*Samadhi* – Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration) as represented by the Three Levels of Intelligence: Mind, Heart, and Energetic Consciousness, and are grouped this way by the Buddha.

The goal of the Noble Eightfold Path is to help one arrive at the Center Column and stay grounded there until enlightenment. Note that it is very easy for anyone to become dislodged from the Center Column, which happens when one is distracted by attachments and aversions that arise as a result of life's events.

The Center Column of the Metta Map represents the Buddha's Middle Way. One always wants to have ready access to the Center Column, as well as a fluid access to all of the other squares, which are resource tools for evaluating and clarifying the input of data and information that is continually bombarding the human condition. This is where the Buddha's skill of "discernment" enters the picture, which is the critical dynamic of the Metta system.

Any prolonged distraction, or attachment to any of the squares causes instability in the individual or the situation. One must always have ready access to the Center Column to stay on the Path, which is our goal as Buddhist practitioners.

Buddhist teacher and scholar, Ven. Walpola Rahula in What the Buddha Taught, said that the components of the Noble Eightfold Path "are to be developed more or less simultaneously, as far as possible, according to the capacity of each individual. They are all linked together and each helps the cultivation of the others."⁽²⁾ In appreciation for Ven. Rahula, he clarifies for us the inter-connectedness and the concurrent, dynamic relationship of all components of the Noble Eightfold Path, and why it is important to maintain the intention of being mindful of all of them at the same time, attending to each one as we practice the Dharma.

Perpetrators and Victims

In the moment of inflicting trauma, whether by a parent, a criminal, or a soldier, the perpetrator has lost his sense of humanity for the victim, which will be illustrated in the following scenarios. He has "thinged" or devalued the victim or victims, and has taken away their humanness. In that same moment, the perpetrator has also become a non-human in the eyes of the victim. They have both lost their connectivity to the universal core of humanity. What we have found through the literature and throughout history is that if the tear of detachment from this core is to be reattached, the same procedure for repair must occur for both victims and perpetrators. The moral fiber that was torn in the act of violence must first be identified, then be fully accepted as actually having occurred, be forgiven, and finally be atoned for, i.e. before the victim and perpetrator can return to "at-one-ment."

This four step mending process is the starting point of reconciliation, and it establishes the framework for building a new relationship between victim and perpetrator. This mending process is transformational, and when it is complete and successful, both parties recognize that they are no longer the same persons they were before the act of violence was committed. In order for the amends to be successful for both victim and perpetrator, it must be both offered and received in both word and deed; a verbal apology is insufficient without an appropriate accompanying Right Action. Both parties have been wounded – not just the victim; for it is in the aftermath of the act of violence that the

perpetrator’s wounds begin to grow. Hence the old Chinese proverb: “When acting in rage – dig two graves.”

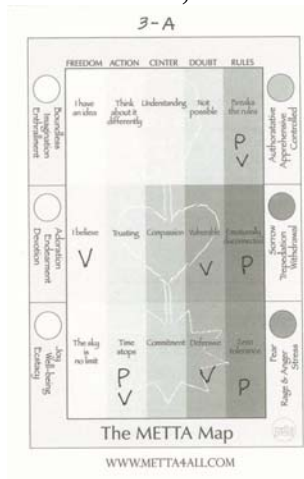
Scenario: Trauma by Parent – The Act

The time is “Hell Hour.” Mom has come home from work, the house is a mess, the kids aren’t doing their homework, dinner isn’t started, friends have come over even though this was not allowed, she’s had a horrific day at work, traffic was jammed, there’s a bicycle in the driveway, her morning requests have been ignored, and the house is in chaos.

Mom comes through the door, sees the chaos, and goes into a rage. She screams at the children to get their friends out, and as she walks through the house her rage grows. She picks up a belt and starts randomly swinging it, hitting the children mercilessly as they scream and try to escape.

Illustration: Trauma by Parent – The Act

V = Children; P = Mom



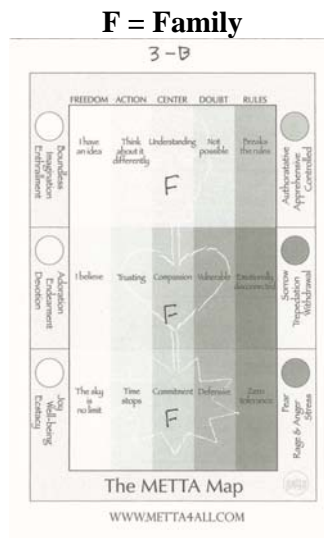
The Metta Map shows where all parties are at this moment of violence. The Mom is in **Zero Tolerance** for the situation. Her heart is closed and she is **Emotionally Disconnected** from her children because the **Rules** have been broken. In her rage, **Time Stops**. The children are **Defensive** and **Vulnerable**; they realize they have broken the **Rules**, and also feel that Mom has broken the **Rules** and betrayed them. They stand in **Time Stops** with their terror, and **Believe** that they are responsible for alienating their mother’s love forever.

Commentary: In reality, both mother and children are victims of life’s circumstances. Mom, in her fatigue, fears that her life is out of control, and she displaces this fear on her children. In this moment the children are terrified; in their childhood narcissism they take full responsibility for violating the household rules, and for provoking their mother’s rage. If this behavior continues, the children will come to understand and believe that upset, conflict, and rage are an acceptable way of life and will perpetuate this behavior in their adult lives. Thus the Biblical expression: “The sins of the fathers.”

Scenario: Trauma by Parent – The Resolution

The children are huddled in the corner, hugging each other and sobbing, saying “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” Mom goes to the kitchen, catches her breath, and starts to weep over the grief of the violence she has just inflicted. Her heart begins to crack open, and all the love for her children as well as her remorse for the act comes spilling out. She collects herself and sees clearly what she has done. She immediately goes to the children and apologizes, embracing them, telling them that she loves them and how sorry she is. She promises that no matter how bad her day, no matter how upset she might be, there is no excuse for what she did. This is her atonement. The children, weeping, apologize as well. They didn’t mean to make her so mad; they didn’t know. They promise to be more respectful of the household rules.

Illustration: Trauma by Parent – The Resolution



The Metta Map shows where all parties are at this moment of reconciliation and resolution. The mom and the children are both **Committed** to the unification of the family. They all have **Compassion** for one another, and they all **Understand** how dangerous and intrusive life’s events can be.

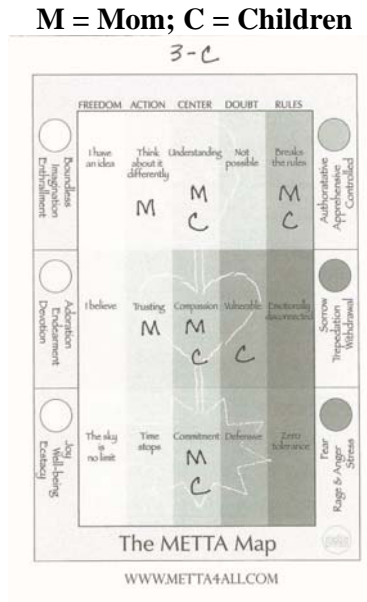
Commentary: In an exhausted heap they hug and rock. They feel the energetic love they all have for one another. The tears begin to subside and their hearts unite. Together, Mom and the kids tidy up the house and prepare dinner. At dinner they say “Grace” and promise to be grateful for what they have, reaffirming that they are a family that loves each other.

Scenario: Same Scenario without Trauma

Exhausted Mom comes home from work and sees the chaos. She stands in the doorway shaking her head, laughing at the absurdity of the situation. The children freeze and look at her, knowing that they really messed up; they pause, quietly waiting for a reaction. Mom comments, “I think it’s time for your guests to go home. We need to tidy up the house before dinner so that you guys can get to your homework.” The children breathe a sigh of relief. The friends stay and help clean up the house and then quietly leave, saying “Goodbye – sorry we made a mess.” Mom goes to the kitchen, and the

children come in to apologize. Mom says, “Thank you guys for cleaning up. It’s really hard when I come home tired, and you know it’s not safe having children in the house when there’s no adult. Please don’t do that again.” The children hug their mom and apologize; without being asked, they start helping to prepare dinner. Where do you want to live?

Illustration: Same Scenario without Trauma



The Metta Map shows where all parties are at this time. Mom walks in and **Understands** that the kids have broken the **Rules**. Standing in Right View she has **Compassion** for their foolishness, and **Thinks About** how to address this violation **Differently** in a skillful way. She **Trusts** in the strength of their relationship, and instructs the children to resume appropriate behavior. She is **Committed** to the well-being and harmony of her family in all circumstances. The children fully **Understand** that they broke the **Rules** and feel **Vulnerable** for their transgressions. They have **Compassion** for their mom and **Understand** that to keep peace in the house they must stay **Committed** to family unity.

Commentary: How precious the pause of reason and compassion in the midst of complicated and upsetting circumstances. Each of us is gifted with this opportunity to pause and breathe, to see a situation as it is, and to be skillful in our responses. No one is harmed. This mom is a reminder to all of us that it is so easy to step one way or the other.

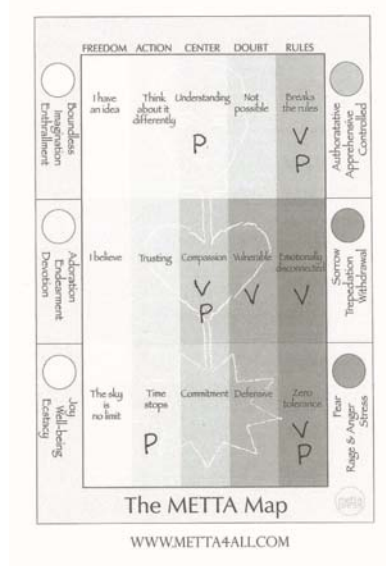
Scenario: Trauma by Criminal – The Act

A 27-year-old man was given a full-on bachelor party at a private nightclub by his friends. All the “trimmings” were on hand for his last garrulous night of bachelorhood. Somehow in the preparation the friends overlooked providing a sober driver. At 2:00 a.m. the groom stumbled into his car, drove out of the parking lot, and in his intoxicated state he entered a freeway going the wrong way. He collided head-on with a family of five and killed them all. The police escorted the groom to jail, and he went into a suicidal depression. The victims’ extended family was simply shrouded in a cloud of grief, bewilderment, and rage.

Illustration: Trauma by Criminal – The Act

V = Family; P = Drunk Driver

4-A



The Metta Map shows where all parties are at this moment of violence. The groom **Understands** that he has violated many **Rules**, and has **Zero Tolerance** for himself. In his shattered state **Time Stops**, and he feels deep **Compassion** for the victims and their family. The victims' family is in **Zero Tolerance** because all **Rules** have been broken. Feeling **Vulnerable** because the world now seems unsafe, they are **Emotionally Disconnected** from the groom/drunken driver; they have deep **Compassion** for each other as they struggle through this unbearable time of sorrow

Commentary: This trauma is a breaking point for everyone involved. Their minds and hearts have been cracked open, and they are left in agony as to how to respond and recover. Each of us will have that moment. How we perceive and process traumatic events will determine the quality of the rest of our lives.

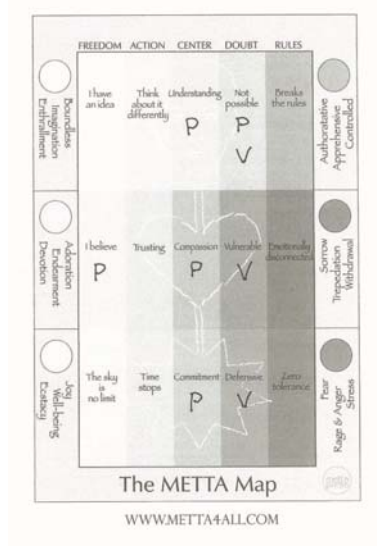
Scenario: Trauma by Criminal – The Transition

The young groom is transferred from jail to a psychiatric hospital because of his suicide attempt. He comes to grips with the consequences of his reckless act and takes responsibility for it. He realizes that an action of atonement must be taken if he is to survive his depression, though he can't imagine how he can make amends. The victims' family feels that it is impossible to move forward. In a cauldron of emotions, they are in and out of anger, confusion, and sorrow.

Illustration: Trauma by Criminal – The Transition

V = Family; P = Drunk Driver

4-B



The Metta Map shows where the drunk driver and the victims’ family are during this transitional period. The drunk driver **Understands** what he has done, and has great **Compassion** for the victims’ family. Even though he is **Committed** to atoning for his actions, he **Believes** that this is **Not Possible**. The victims’ family feels that it is **Not Possible** to forgive the drunken driver, and they still feel **Vulnerable** and **Defensive**.

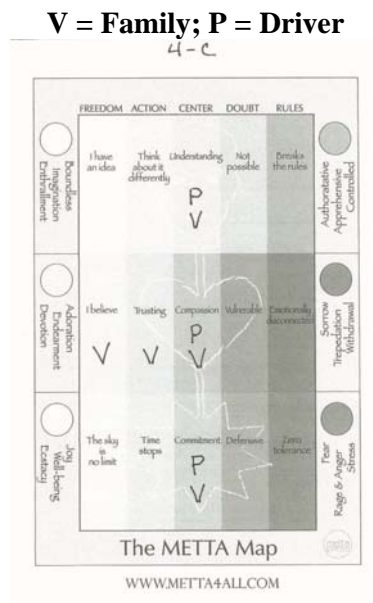
Commentary: In this vulnerable state, once again there is a fork in the road. The tenderness of the situation requires pausing and breathing to cultivate the beginning of Right View. It is in the opening of the heart that seeds of forgiveness and atonement are planted; they must be watered and nurtured for them to mature. If indignation and ego take hold, these seeds of redemption can die.

Scenario: Trauma by Criminal – The Resolution (1)

The driver agonizes and wrestles with depression, trying to survive his guilt for the next two years. He spends time in jail and receives counseling. He eventually conjures up the courage to write the victims’ family a letter. He expresses his deep sorrow, and offers a prayer that they have been able to recover from their losses. He lets them know that he hasn’t yet forgiven himself for his deed. During this time of reflection and soul-searching he decides that since he had been a successful, high-profile person, when he is released from prison he would go to high schools, universities, and civic clubs to speak in memory of the family he killed. For his atonement he would tell his story, and the burden he has had to bear, with the intention of preventing future sorrows, grief, and trauma for others – be they victims or perpetrators.

After two years the victim's family receives the driver's letter from jail. The sincerity of the letter pierces their wall of rage, allowing for the realization that he is a human being who is also suffering. This shift eases their sorrow for themselves, and opens their hearts to all suffering beings.

Illustration: Trauma by Criminal – The Resolution (1)



The Metta Map shows us that the driver has come to Right View and clearly **Understands** what he must do for atonement. He has **Compassion** for all involved: the victims' family, his parents, his fiancée, his siblings, his friends and colleagues, the police who attended the accident scene, and himself. He is fully **Committed** to responsible behavior, keeping an open heart of loving-kindness for all beings, and practicing his method of atonement whenever possible. The victims' family **Understands** that they can never replace their lost loved ones, and that sorrow and suffering are inevitable occurrences in the life experience. They have **Compassion** for themselves and the driver, they **Trust** in the healing process, and **Believe** that they can continue moving on. They also feel **Committed** to not cause harm to others, to not be quick to judge, and to stay present in their affections toward one another.

Commentary: The First Noble Truth is that there will be suffering. The Second Noble Truth is that there is a cause for suffering. The Third Noble Truth tells us that there is a remedy for our suffering. The Fourth Noble Truth, the Noble Eightfold Path, gives us the tools for liberating us from our suffering. It is in times of trauma that we are challenged to stay on the Path.

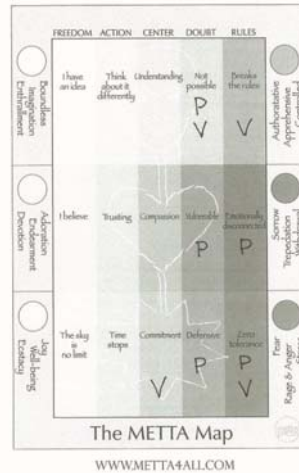
Scenario: Trauma by Criminal – The Resolution (2)

The driver's depression deepens and permeates every aspect of his life, and drives him deeper and deeper into hopelessness and despair where suicidal ideation is ever-present. He copes with drugs and alcohol, which deepens his alienation. He feels chronically disconnected from others, and is exhausted in his attempt to defend the circumstances of his life. The victim's family remains in rage and sorrow, clinging to the

violation from this experience. They make their martyred circumstance the family identity, and remain committed to defending their indignation for the rest of their lives.

Illustration: Trauma by Criminal – The Resolution (2)

V = Family; P = Drunk Driver



The Metta Map shows us that the driver has never embraced his responsibility for his actions, and he thinks it's **Not Possible** to ever change his state of being. He remains **Emotionally Disconnected** from himself and everyone else, and is **Vulnerable** to continued despair. He has **Zero Tolerance** for his circumstances, and is **Defensive** when confronted. His lack of Commitment to anything makes him subject to the whims of his angst. The victims' family, giving vent to their rage and sorrow, have **Zero Tolerance** for the driver, and are 100% **Committed** to their martyred identity, which keeps them in chronic trauma. Their **Rules** are that they must continue their crusade of sorrow, and it's **Not Possible** to change. Their hearts are closed.

Commentary: Clinging, clinging, clinging – the source of all suffering. With trauma, the drama is so acute that the nerve-endings of the body want to cling on so tightly for fear that if they ever let loose another trauma would occur. It's a strange way to protect oneself; totally unskillful, but a far too-common event.

Scenario: Trauma by War – The Act

There are no words to adequately describe the horrors of war, and the trauma that radiates through generations can induce Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome Disorder (PTSD) in individuals, families, towns, cities, and countries. The consequences of war can linger for centuries. To say that we can create a scenario that is a complete representation would be naïve. We will try, however, to give a sample from one family that reflects three generations of suffering and the consequential destruction of familial ties.

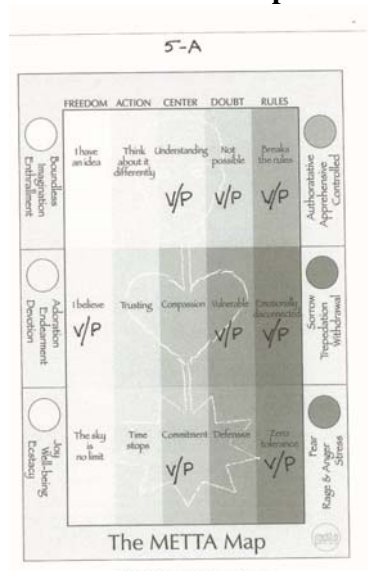
My father was a pilot in World War II. He was twenty years old, a young Christian who had just finished chiropractic school. Early on it was to his credit, and later on to his shame, that he had bombed most of the major cities of Europe. During his last

flight his plane was shot down. He was able to save most of his crew, but he was the last to parachute out. His co-pilot was unconscious, so he took him with him out of the plane. Due to the weight, the landing shattered both of my father's legs, and the co-pilot was dead.

War is a double-edged sword in which each individual member of the combat forces on both sides of the conflict experiences being both victim, and if not immediately then subsequently, and also a perpetrator. This Scenario will utilize the Metta Map to chart the trauma from its origin, through its transition period, and finally to its resolution of atonement – for one individual, my father.

Illustration: Trauma by War – The Act

V/P = Dr. R. Shepard



Using the Metta Map, my father **Understood** that he was in an aerial combat zone. Being shot down from his plane, however, instantly obliterated the **Rules** of immortal youth, and shattered his belief that he would go home in one piece. He was **Vulnerable** to the enemy, **Emotionally** and physically **Disconnected** from any support system, and in **Zero Tolerance** for the fact that he was rendered helpless and could not defend himself. He **Believed** that death was a possibility; and if death didn't come, he **Believed** it would **Not** be **Possible** to escape. His **Commitment** to America was still at 100%.

Commentary: Armies are populated by the young and the idealistic, and by the hungry and the poor. Their training inflates their idealism and their sense of power and immortality. These are rapidly shattered by trauma in the combat zone, and the veil of denial is pierced.

Scenario: Trauma by War – The Transition

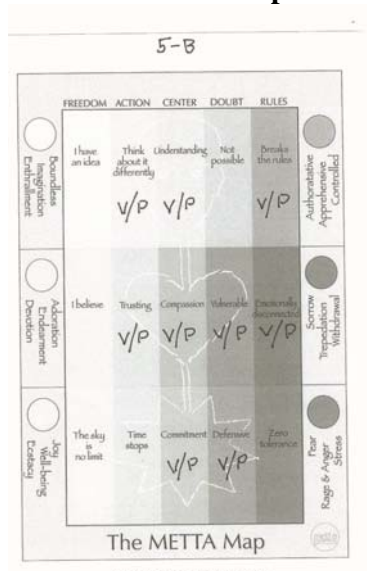
My father was captured and taken to hospital. His right leg was amputated, and he spent the next eight months as a POW. For the family, he was listed as MIA and presumed dead. My mother was eighteen with an infant child. Working two shifts she was now a widow.

While in hospital my father was blessed with kind nurses and doctors – despite the fact that they were war enemies. This blessing of kindness caused confusion, and initiated the questioning of the rightness of killing anyone.

Fast-forward many years. My father escaped from prison and returned to the United States. He resumed his chiropractic practice with my mother as his assistant. Unable to face his new identity as an amputee, he felt that he was less than a full man. He took to carousing and womanizing to prove himself in his altered state. He was full of nightmare and anger, unable to express or talk about what had happened in the war. A divorce followed, and estrangement, multiple marriages.

Illustration: Trauma by War – The Transition

V/P = Dr. R. Shepard



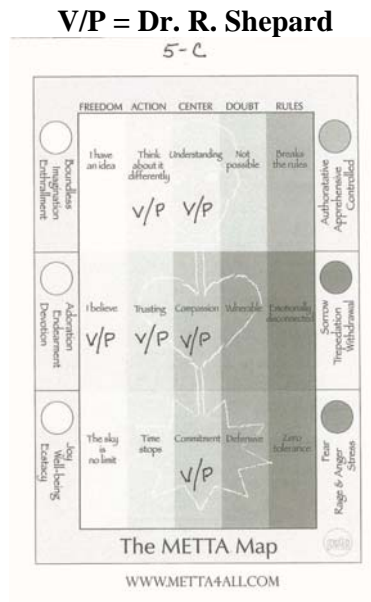
Using the Metta Map, my father traversed to an intermediate stage in his progressive journey toward resolution and atonement. This is just a snapshot of where my father was at one point in time. He **Understood** that he was more complex than he ever imagined in his youth, and that he had broken **Rules** with reckless abandon. He started **Thinking** about life **Differently**, always feeling somewhat guarded and **Emotionally Disconnected**. He cultivated great **Compassion** for others, albeit at arms-length due to his **Vulnerability**. He **Defended** his history with an encasement of non-disclosure, **Trusted** in his abilities, and remained **Committed** to economic and social success, which was based on his perceived duty to do the right thing.

Commentary: Transitions are not simple or instantaneous, but complex, entangled, full of joy and sorrow, disappointment and success. Much like adolescence, it is unpredictable and uncertain as to outcome, often impulsive and full of woe. Transitions are full of turning points, full of times for pausing and reflecting to consider the consequences of one’s decisions. It is critical to keep track of intention to avoid being diverted by delusions and fabrications, and seduced into clinging to what appears to be the easy way.

Scenario: Trauma by War – The Resolution

During his third marriage he spent 25 years going back to Europe every year to see the reconstruction of the cities he had bombed. He belonged to service organizations that supported students and communities in Europe. That said, it wasn't until much later that we were able to be close as a father and daughter, and it wasn't until my son was in his twenties that my father could have a family relationship with his grandson. He was eighty before he could tell his war stories, which enabled him to feel a sense of atonement. This was perhaps the last purging of the PTSD that he had endured for over sixty years.

Illustration: Trauma by War – The Resolution



Using the Metta Map, we see that my father **Understood** that he was a part of a complex time in history. He had **Compassion** for himself as well as for all of the comrades in service on both sides of the conflict. He also came to have **Compassion** for the families on both sides that suffered the collateral damage, the insidious isolation that was imposed and endured as the result of dividing up Europe and destroying the fundamental fabric of the American family. He learned to **Trust** in Friendship, see things **Differently**, and **Believe** that there was goodness in humanity as well as evil. He no longer needed to defend his past, and he remained **Committed** to duty, to country, and to his family until his death.

Commentary: Resolution, reconciliation, and grace come at their own paces. The elements necessary for the trauma victim to repair are: to see clearly what occurred; to understand how it happened; and to learn how to survive this knowledge through relating their story to another so it is no longer buried in the heart. It is necessary to find an expression of restitution and amends with Right Action. It is also necessary to execute and perform this action to give it meaning, so it can replace symbolically, if not actually, the damage that was done in the past. For my father, it took over forty-five years of effort for him to begin to feel that he could hope for atonement.

The scenarios above illustrate the four-step mending process, which can lead to reconciliation. Anywhere along the way there is the opportunity to clarify and move towards repair or redemption. There is even more opportunity for the hurt and anger to

derail into unhappiness and lead back to the trauma. To be successful, this process needs to be cultivated with great skill.

Summary

In conclusion, I hope it is now clear that for any trauma to be resolved – be it minor, medium, or huge – it is best served by acknowledging the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path; by not getting lost and believing that suffering is unique, that it does not have a source, and that it does not have a remedy. When trauma is not resolved, the individual, family, community, etc. can get tossed into the pit of despair. The illustrations given above are limited, and yet I hope communicate the extremes of the continuum of trauma. The specific techniques for personal and clinical application of the Metta Process have not been discussed in this paper. For those who are interested, please contact the author.

In our first example, we see that in our daily lives we have opportunities to pause and correct our path. When using the Metta Map as a guidepost you can quickly see if you have slipped into fear and anger on the right side of the Map, and have temporarily lost contact with the Middle Way.

In our second illustration we demonstrated how trauma can begin to radiate beyond two parties, and that no matter how skillful one may be, the healing process requires time and diligence. It also requires cooperation from a closed heart to embrace what seems unbearable, which is for the victim to forgive the perpetrator. Atonement and amends must be a conscious Right Action.

In our third illustration we see how processing through trauma evolved over a 60-year period. In the absence of having a tool such as the Metta Map, we saw how the process of healing from the horrors of war was prolonged. It is my desire that all of us who live with and/or treat all forms of suffering, from the minor to the major, have the benefit of using this Map as a guidepost and aid; that it serve as a companion reminder to those precious wounded that there is a visual queuing way they can use to re-direct themselves and get clarity on this healing path; that it help both victims and perpetrators have success by approximation; and that it keeps them from falling into oblivion in a *trauma bond* that will not release them to intimacy, love, and hope for the balance of their lives.

The last intention of this paper is to invite you, as Buddhist practitioners and educators, to take this tool, this Metta Map, and explore it for your own application in both intra and interpersonal conflict resolution. I know that you will bring an additional richness to the Metta System as it continues its process of evolution. If the reader is frustrated by any unanswered questions or limitations in this paper, it is solely the author's responsibility.

I am grateful to the clients and life teachers who have endured and generously shared their suffering and experiences of trauma with me. May their examples of healing radiate throughout the world.

References:

A Buddhist Catechism: According to the Canon of the Southern Church, Col. H. S. Olcott; first published by the Theosophical Society, 1881.

Azim's Bardo: A Father's Journey from Murder to Forgiveness, Azim Noordin Khamisa; Tariq Khamisa Foundation 1998

Beyond Forgiveness: Reflections on Atonement, Phil Coisineau; Josey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, 2011

Dharma & The Metta Map, Dr. Barbara Wright with Dr. Stephen Long; not yet completed.

Iroquois on Fire: A Voice from the Mohawk Nation, Douglas M. George-Kanentiio; University of Nebraska Press, 2008

The Triangulation of Vectors Where "Time Stops": The Source of All Suffering, Dr. Barbara Wright; paper presented at Sakyadhita International Buddhist Women's Conference, Bangkok, Thailand; 2011

War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Edward Tick; Quest Books, 2005

What the Buddha Taught, Ven. Walpola Rahula; Grove Press, Revised Edition 1974