ATOP Meaningfulworld Psychosocial Rehabilitation Mission for Haiti:
Healing, Ecology & Spirituality: Utilizing the 7-step Integrative Healing Model in Haiti – ATOP Meaningfulworld Team 5

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It is difficult to imagine that although 2.5 years have passed since the devastating earthquake in Haiti, still homes are not reconstructed; there is no running water, no electricity, no food, and people are still living in tents. You are still mourning for your loved ones killed in the quake. Although the pain is becoming less heart wrenching, you are extremely frustrated and disappointed for the status quo, as no one even talks about reconstruction and getting out of tent cities.

The fifth team of the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) Meaningfulworld witnessed many people in these extreme situations. Well over 50% of Haiti’s population is still suffering from these issues of survival. Our team began the mission with the 2nd International Conference on Spirituality and Psychotherapy, with a theme: International Conference on Spirituality, Psychotherapy and Ecology in Haiti: An interdisciplinary approach towards healing. The conference was organized by Fr. Wismick, Vice President of the University of Notre Dame in Haiti. Over 176 practitioners, students, faculty of social work, psychology, theology, and nursing gathered at the University of Notre Dame for this transformative conference.

ATOP Team (left to right): M. Gonen, R. Griff, Dr Ani, L. Schiller, absent S. Tumbling

I was one of the featured speakers focusing on Disaster, Healing, Forgiveness, and Meaning-making. Additionally, I conducted a workshop with the entire audience on the 7-step Integrative Healing Model with the assistance of our ATOP team. Team members were: Lisa Schiller, Michele Gones, Shayla Tumbling, and Richard Griff. It was moving to find previous
trainees gathered waiting for us, eager to reconnect, receive refresher, and work with us in the field. It was amazing to see that the earthquake caused by a shifting of the earth plates had also shifted the attitudes of those trained by ATOP, and they were now open to learn more and integrate their own authentic knowledge from their indigenous belief systems.

After the two-day conference, we began our outreach through the Community Hospital, the Boy’s Orphanage, and other areas. It takes a lot of time to get around from one location to another due to poor roads, extreme disorganization, sidewalks taken over by merchants, and pedestrians walking in the streets, all making driving more challenging.

The preliminary findings of those affected by the earthquake reveal 10% experience moderate to severe PTSD, overall generalized anxiety, shock, and a feeling that the earth is still shaking. In addition to the 7-step Integrative Healing Model we also had flower remedies donated by Nelsons, such as Rescue Remedy, Rescue Gel (for physical pains), and Rescue Pastels, with great results of relief. Workshop attendees expressed the healing powers of our 7-step model, they improved their ability to express their feelings and release their trauma, reported feeling in peace, harmony, and physically and emotionally empowered. In the orphanage the team worked on importance of short and long-term goals, how to accomplish them, and how to present their skills in resumes, computer skills, the Four Agreements, the COPE Model of Assertive & Spiritual connections, lessons learned, and the physical release exercises to open the energy centers. The boys ages 8-23 enjoyed these approaches and especially the physical release, and each day they wanted to do more and more of it.

ATOP Team members shared their personal feelings. Michele Gonen said: During the conference, it felt surreal to practice skills like mindful meditation or using aspects of the 7-step model that I have done back in New York, but this time with other psychology students and professionals in Haiti. It was great to see many attendees invigorated to continue learning about our healing method. We had some adventures, including staying at a monastery, meeting with a spiritual healer, observing gender violence from afar, riding in a tap-tap (local transport in the back of a pick-up truck), doing yoga on the roof of monastery, waking up by roosters, and dancing to the local music such as kompa.

Richard Griff shared the following: Although I have been to Haiti five times before (prior to earthquake), it served a meaningful purpose when working in the orphanage. It has brought joy and a sense of purpose to these children’s lives and it is especially valuable: sports, art therapy, play therapy, and the seven-step model.

Shayla Tumbling shared: I was in love with Haiti and its people before I came through my preassessment research & readings; it was reinforced since I have been here, and I am so
excited about our work here. It may seem that the language barrier would be an obstacle but I have embraced the heart and the rhythm of the Haitian people, and have found creative ways to transform from it.

An example of the waste everywhere

Strong, capable youth are hanging around everywhere with nothing to do

*ATOP Team Leader Lisa Schiller* stated: I found it very exciting to begin with an introduction of the current interest in Haiti in integrating spirituality and psychology. It was heartening that a Catholic University was open to complementary modalities such as guided imagery, Native American Rituals, massage, and our 7-step Integrative Model. It seemed like the cartelism of the earthquake has opened up interest of the people. Conducting our 7-step workshop was gratifying for me because of the immense response, openness by psychology students, nuns, priests and faculty members. The most refreshing to me was to see nuns in a warrior position.

Participants in experiential energy session

ATOP Team at the Community Hospital with Haitian Interpreter

The focus of all ATOP teams was to help survivors recover from feelings of helplessness, fear, nightmares and uncertainty, which are normal symptoms after such a horrendous calamity, to guide them to learn about themselves, their resilience, and to find a new meaning. ATOP teams (total of 5) have worked with orphans, adults and children in tent cities, patients in hospitals, media personal, government officials, and the community at large.
Initially, 3 months after the earthquake, the majority of participants experienced clinically significant posttraumatic stress symptoms, with 128 meeting criteria for mild PTSD (64.6%). Additionally, 56 participants met for moderate PTSD (28.3%), and 1 person met for severe PTSD (.5%). Thirteen participants (6.6%) failed to meet the minimum criteria for posttraumatic stress. Overall, women displayed higher levels of PTSD than did men (t = 2.877, p < .004). Women also reported experiencing more severe trauma, but the difference was not statistically significant (t = 1.551, p = .122). Education level correlated with level of PTSD symptomatology; participant education was negatively correlated with PTSD symptomatology (r = .251, p < .001). Examining participant age by creating a binned variable (splitting the groups at the age of 30) yielded no significant effects.

One year follow up research revealed lower levels of trauma (M = 1.88, SD = .63), while levels of forgiveness were fairly high (M = 3.65, SD = .93). Overall, there was a strong correlation between the average number of post-traumatic stress symptoms and dispositional forgiveness, r (45) = .55, p < .01. Furthermore, trauma significantly predicted forgiveness, and trauma explained a significant proportion of variance in forgiveness scores, R2 = .30, F (1, 44) = 18.90, p < .01.

Since we are energetically closely connected to mother earth, what and how we feel will closely impact Gaia, Mother Earth. As the previous ATOP Teams observed, this team also observed destructive behavior directed to Mother Earth such as piling garbage in front of hospitals, homes, stores and vendors then burning them at night, including burning plastic, Styrofoam, and other toxic matters, as well as cutting down trees to cook food.

Most of the complications and challenges in Haiti are human-made: governmental neglect and corruption, generational cycles of gender violence, political dominance, suppressing their spiritual beliefs and embracing western Christina extremist beliefs, resulting in generalized apathy. We invited Haitians to bring mindfulness into their daily rituals, and including a focus of peace, inclusion, love, and transparency. A climate fever is the earth’s inability to shed a tear for our inhumane actions and diminishment of its omnipotent structure. Haitians are left without the
ability to breathe, without the natural resources to drink, and without spiritual healing process to sustain the future generations.

We cannot change the direction of the wind, nor stop the earth from quaking....but we can create a sustainable future through our own actions. Our focus must turn to gender, age, health, agriculture, indigenous peoples, livestock, poverty, food security, peace, and sustainable development. Rediscovering and tapping into the Earth’s immune system we can halt the planets decline reviving its natural healing abilities. I invite you to tune into its most sensitive needs and stop aggressing and disrupting its eco-balance.

Dr. Ani donating her 3 books to Fr Wismick for the University- Shayla is explaining how to use natural “rescue pastel” to a survivor

Our Motto: When one helps another both become stronger.

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