

The day after the London bombings in July I was at a trauma workshop. The leader, Steve Regel, a cognitive behavioural psychotherapist, works for the NHS and covers many of the dramatic disasters, from the tsunami to murders. While I have doubts about cognitive behavioural therapy as a cure-all, I have no doubt that it is invaluable first aid, and can help people with chronic patterns of behaviour and thinking to get their lives back in order. Steve was unfazed by the extreme stories he needed to encourage people to tell as part of their healing. 'I remind myself it isn't me', he said. And he had met people whose more humanistic counsellor had been distressed by their story. The clients did not feel they could tell it fully. Sometimes empathy can be overwhelming, a 'blessing and curse', according to Brian Thorne.

A week later I was on another workshop, three days with Franz Ruppert, a Professor of Psychology in Munich who works with trans-generational trauma through Constellations. We hope to publish some of his work next year, but the workshop made a very strong case for the trauma that continues unhealed through several generations. We thought of two world wars in the last century, as well as all the other disasters experienced by a people who believed in a stiff upper lip as the correct response to difficulties of any kind. There is little cultural support for grieving, for expression and for the rituals of completion and moving on. Perhaps it is not surprising that British and Western culture shows so many signs of being out of contact, desensitized to fearful images, and intent on chasing the distractions of material gain.

The people who bombed London seemed to their families to be living without any such plans. Franz Ruppert believed they would have had some trauma in their personal background, or in previous generations, which was expressed in this destructive way. And of course this also operates at a cultural and collective level.

Focusing is our topic for this issue. Compared with CBT, it is at another edge – working with the subtleties of human experience, the contemplative contact with body sensation. For some people just this contact will put them in direct touch with the trauma they feel they need to avoid. But Focusing offers a possibility that we can stay in touch with ourselves, and know our emerging feelings. Perhaps this is a good protection against acting to hurt or to kill.

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Maxine has been burgled and lost her computer with her email address book. If you have been in contact with her at all, please send your email address to her at: maxine.linnell@virgin.net

Correction

In the last issue we incorrectly published an article by Dr Stephane Duckett under the name of Chris Botterill. Many apologies to both.