

Psychological Trauma, Implicit Memory, and the Verbal Logical Explainer

Supplementary material for handout

Copyright 2009 Karl D. Lehman, M.D. & Charlotte E. T. Lehman, M.Div., New February 2009

Receiving attunement as the “first choice” intervention: We present receiving attunement (either from the Lord or from others in our community) as the “first choice,” since it is such an *ideal* intervention for reestablishing access to our relational connection circuits. Not only is it usually the most efficient intervention for getting us back into relational mode, but it also provides several important additional benefits:

1.) Contributes to permanently healing the underlying traumas: As mentioned earlier, in order to successfully process a painful experience we need to stay in relational mode *as we feel the negative emotions associated with the experience*, and providing this necessary condition by keeping our relational circuits on line *while connected to the painful experience and feeling the negative emotions* is one of the most important tasks on the pain processing pathway. As also mentioned earlier, being unable to maintain access to our relational circuits is one of the most common and most important processing failures that causes painful experiences to become traumatic, and one of the most common and most important pieces of unresolved content carried in traumatic memories is loss of access to our relational circuits. Therefore, regaining access to our relational circuits while feeling the pain associated with the underlying traumatic memories is often one of the first things we need to do in order to resume successful processing, *and receiving attunement while triggered and connected to the negative emotions enables us to do this*. Furthermore, in addition to helping us regain access to our relational circuits (*return to relational mode*), receiving attunement also enables us to augment our capacity and maturity skills, and this helps us successfully complete the important processing task of *staying* in relational mode as we experience the painful emotions associated with the memories.

2.) Increases our ability to remain in relational mode as we return to the triggering situations: As also discussed earlier, since receiving attunement helps us with the processing task of *staying* in relational mode *while connected to the traumatic memories and toxic content*, to the extent this processing task gets successfully completed we will be able to go back into the original situations *and remain in relational mode*, even though we will often be re-engaging with the same triggers that will continue to stir up the same underlying traumas.

3.) Builds psychological maturity skills: Being able to successfully complete the processing task of staying in relational mode while feeling the negative emotions associated with a painful experience is a *skill* that can be *learned*. This is discussed in much greater detail in Part II of the “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who is With Us” series, but the very short summary is that we practice and learn this psychological maturity skill by repeatedly losing access to our relational connection circuits, and then receiving attunement and returning to relational mode *while still connected to the painful experiences/traumatic memories and feeling the negative emotions*. Another way to say this is that the experience of regaining access to our relational circuits *while still feeling the negative emotions* is what strengthens the connections that provide the neurological basis for *learning* and *remembering* the *skill* of being able to stay in relational mode even while experiencing painful emotions.

The “receiving attunement” intervention therefore gives us a ***“four for one” super bonus deal***

– in addition to getting us back into relational mode for dealing with the problems confronting us in the present, we also receive these three additional benefits.

Appreciation and calming as independent tools for regaining access to relational connection circuits: Receiving attunement is the ideal intervention for regaining access to our relational circuits for all the reasons just discussed; however, some people are not yet able to perceive the Lord’s attuning presence, for those of us usually able to receive attunement from the Lord there will be times when something is blocking this, and there will be times when there is no one from our community available to provide attunement. In these situations it is good to be aware of calming and “stand alone” appreciation as alternative interventions that we can use to regain access to our relational connection circuits.

“Stand alone” appreciation: As I was practicing with the above “receiving attunement from the Lord” intervention I accidentally discovered that deliberate appreciation can be an effective “stand alone” intervention for getting myself back into relational mode. What happened was that I would sometimes get carried away with the appreciation step, so that I would continue with deliberate appreciation until I felt a strong sense of subjective gratitude, and it was on one of these occasions that I noticed something strange: “Wait a minute! I’m just getting ready to ask the Lord to be with me, but I’m already back in relational mode. That’s not supposed to happen until I perceive His presence, talk to Him about my pain, and then receive His attunement!” After this puzzling observation I began to watch more carefully, and quickly noticed that whenever I persisted with appreciation to the point of robust gratitude, *I would always be back in relational mode even though I had not even started with the steps to connect with the Lord and receive His attunement.* Once we realized this Charlotte and I began to experiment with deliberate appreciation as a “stand alone” intervention for getting us back to relational mode, and we discovered that there were certain situations where appreciation was the right tool for the job. For example, we have gotten into situations where we were both triggered into non-relational mode, we were having difficulty with the “receiving attunement” intervention for a variety of reasons,¹ but persistent deliberate appreciation was still effective, and this enabled us to get our relational circuits back online so that we could end the day being glad to be together. Furthermore, when appreciation is successful the resulting return to relational mode tends to be more stable than when we get back to relational mode through simple calming,² and this is especially true when we do the hard work of appreciating the person(s) we are upset with.

As Charlotte and I have practiced with appreciation as a “stand alone” intervention for

¹For those who are able to perceive the Lord’s presence, the most common reason for having difficulty with receiving attunement is not yet being able to accurately articulate the pain in the underlying memories. From the perspective of the child inside the memories, we can’t feel heard and understood when we are not yet accurately articulating what we are really upset about.

²When I return to relational mode through simple calming, without any additional interventions to prevent relapse, I find that I am especially liable to fall back into non-relational mode when I return to the situation that caused me to lose access to my relational circuits in the first place.

regaining access to our relational circuits we have made a number of observations we hope will be helpful for others who are learning to use deliberate appreciation in this way:

- Naming *anything* I appreciate – even things like “I appreciate that I don’t have to go to bed hungry” – provides some benefit. It has to be true, but as long as it’s honest, naming even the smallest details that you are grateful for will contribute to the overall appreciation momentum.
- Naming appreciations in the context of specific memories is especially powerful. For example, when I name abstract concepts that I appreciate about the Lord, such as His omnipotence and faithfulness, I feel appreciation but the subjective sense of gratitude is very subtle. In contrast, when I name the details I especially appreciate from my personal experiences of perceiving the Lord’s presence I feel a much stronger sense of gratitude.³
- If I’m upset with Charlotte, then thinking about positive memories *with Charlotte* and naming specific things I appreciate *about Charlotte* is both especially difficult and especially helpful in regaining access to my relational circuits.
- When naming appreciations in the context of specific memories, working with several memories can be necessary in order to end up with robust gratitude. For example, I can think about the time when I had a terrible case of the flu and Charlotte was especially considerate and nurturing while I was messy and miserable, and as I name specific details I appreciate about how she cared for me during this time I can feel my appreciation go from zero to three. Then I can think about the time Charlotte went to great lengths to get me a Christmas gift that I really liked and that was a complete surprise, and as I name specific details I appreciate about the care she took to do something she knows is especially meaningful to me I can feel my appreciation go from three to seven. And then when I think about the time Charlotte spent many, many hours caring for members of my family who were in crisis, as I name specific details I appreciate about how she poured out her heart and time in caring for *my* family I can feel my appreciation go from seven to ten.
- As Charlotte and I have been practicing deliberate appreciation for many months now, we have discovered that most of our appreciation has actually come from small things. Bigger events, like those just mentioned above, are more dramatic, but for Charlotte and I most of our appreciation actually comes from acts of kindness, service, generosity, etc that are “small,” but that have an overall effect that accumulates with thousands of repetitions. For example, Charlotte takes care of our laundry. This would not be a big deal if it happened once, but when I think about how she has cared for me in this way *week in and week out for 18 years*, I can feel some serious gratitude.

³For additional discussion of the special value of doing deliberate appreciation exercises in the context of specific memories, including detailed examples, see the “Memory of previous positive connection = especially good context” section in Part V of the “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who is With Us” series.

- It's okay to appreciate the same thing more than once. This may seem funny to some, but when I first started to practice with deliberate appreciation I felt like I was writing an essay for English class, where it is considered poor form to use the exact same adjective over and over again. If you're talking about something really large and it comes into the story more than once, you can refer to it as "huge" the first time you mention it, but then you need to find a variety of synonyms, such as "gigantic," "immense," "titanic," and "enormous" for subsequent appearances. Similarly, I felt like I had to come up with new things to appreciate each time I practiced with our deliberate appreciation exercises. *It is* a fun part of the challenge to see how many different things you can find to appreciate, but the point here is not to impress our highschool English teachers. As long as you are still truly grateful for it, you can appreciate a given blessing over and over and over again. For example, I was practicing appreciation while out walking recently, and about every five minutes I realized that I was still truly grateful for the bright, sunny day (a non-trivial blessing in January in Chicago). So every five minutes I named this (again), and thanked the Lord for the sunshine (again). The laundry mentioned above provides another example. Every week I realize that I still appreciate Charlotte doing the laundry. So I name this (again), thank her for it (again), and feel a subjective sense of gratitude (again).
- We can tell when appreciation is working – when appreciation is successful we *feel* gratitude, the more effectively we succeed in deliberate appreciation the more robust our subjective feeling of gratitude will be, and the more robust our gratitude the more solid our return to relational mode.
- Every aspect of deliberate appreciation gets easier with practice. Charlotte and I have been experimenting with ending the day with ~thirty minutes of naming specific things we appreciate about each other, and we try to do this at least two to three times each week. After several months of this regular practice we have found that the whole process has gotten easier, subjective feelings of gratitude come more quickly, and the end result is usually more robust.

In my experience, the biggest problem with appreciation is that it is really hard to do when you are in a foul mood, and the worse you feel the harder it is. For example, when I'm really triggered, non-relational, and it feels like Charlotte is my enemy, it's hard to think of anything I appreciate about her, and even when I think of something I *know* is true I don't want to acknowledge it. The only kind of "appreciations" I feel like acknowledging are things like "I appreciate that she's not a selfish, immature poo poo head *all* the time," and even this comes out grudgingly. Even so, if I am able to discipline myself to persist in thinking about positive memories with Charlotte and naming specific things I appreciate about her, *regardless of my initial lack of enthusiasm*, my relational circuits always eventually come back on line.

Calming: Fortunately, we have been designed so that our brains and minds *prefer* to be in relational mode – we have been designed so that running in relational mode is the "normal," optimal, most comfortable way for our brains and minds to function. In fact, the Lord has designed us so that our brains and minds will "automatically" find the way back to relational mode as we calm down. That is, if we get upset to the point that we drop into non-relational mode, our brains and minds will find the way back to relational mode *without any other more*

sophisticated intervention if we find a way to calm the negative emotions that caused us to drop into non-relational mode in the first place. Although there are ways in which appreciation and receiving attunement are more ideal interventions for regaining access to our relational circuits, calming is sometimes easier and more accessible, especially for those who have not yet developed skill with deliberate appreciation or receiving attunement. For example, reading familiar, comforting, encouraging scripture (such as Psalm 23), various forms of meditative prayer, listening to music, aerobic exercise (such as bicycling, walking, swimming, or running), deep breathing, and other relaxation exercises are all simple interventions that help us calm down, and these interventions are easily accessible even if we are in a bad mood, are not able to perceive the Lord's presence, and are not with someone who can attune to us.

Calming and "stand alone" appreciation are helpful alternative tools in that they will enable to us to return to relational mode, but in contrast to receiving attunement, when we use these tools for reestablishing access to our relational circuits *we will no longer be connected to the painful experiences/traumatic memories or feeling the associated negative emotions by the time we have returned to relational mode*. And as you will probably have noticed, regaining access to our relational circuits *while still connected to the pain and feeling the negative emotions* is a necessary ingredient for each of the additional benefits associated with receiving attunement. Therefore, when we use "stand alone" appreciation or calming to get our relational circuits back on line *we will* receive the many benefits of getting back into relational mode, but we will *not* contribute to permanently healing the underlying traumas, increase our ability to remain in relational mode as we return to the triggering situations, or build psychological maturity skills.⁴

In fact, I will sometimes *intentionally* skip the appreciation at the beginning of a "receive attunement from the Lord" intervention *so that I will still be feeling the negative emotions as I receive the Lord's attunement*, and thereby harvest these additional benefits. As I practiced receiving attunement from the Lord over the course of many months I noticed that it became easier and easier to perceive His presence and sense that He was hearing me, I discovered that I could often jump right to this piece without the need for any initial appreciation to prepare the way, and I eventually put these pieces together with the insights regarding additional benefits. Now, if I have the time and energy, I will deliberately jump right to inviting the Lord to be with, asking Him to help me perceive His presence, and talking to Him about my pain *so that I will still be connected to the trauma as I receive His attunement*. If I'm especially in the mood for personal growth I go back and forth between receiving attunement from the Lord and *deliberately stirring up the triggers* so as to maximize these additional benefits of permanent healing, increased ability to stay relational when returning to the problem, and strengthened maturity skills. When I've had enough personal growth for the day (or I'm running out of time), I rigorously focus on positive memories and name specific appreciations in order to make sure I have fully regained access to my relational circuits before re-engaging with the triggering situation that caused me to fall out of relational mode in the first place.

⁴It would actually be more accurate to say "...or build *the same* psychological maturity skills, since being able to deliberately calm ourselves (using appreciation or any other techniques) is itself a psychological maturity skill. For any who have not yet learned to do this, then practicing deliberate calming by any method will build this important, basic skill.

Practical thoughts/tips regarding the relational connection circuits check-list:

- An interesting phenomena with respect to our relational connection circuits is that the need and desire for someone to attune to me – to see me, hear me, understand me, empathize with me, care about me, and be glad to be with me – is the *one relational aspect of my being that still remains even when I have lost access to my relational connection circuits*. Therefore, if I am asking “do I feel desire to be connected to Charlotte? Do I experience her presence as a source of joy? Am I glad to be with her?” in the context of imagining Charlotte attuning to me, I can get “yes” answers even though I have actually lost access to my relational connection circuits. When using the relational connection circuits check-list, it is important to answer the questions *while either experiencing or imagining the person doing things other than seeing, hearing, understanding, empathizing, caring, and being glad to be with you*.
****for book, include this as part of additional discussion in the main body checklist discussion****

Practical thoughts/tips regarding the “receiving attunement” exercises for getting relational circuits back on line:

- Many of the above observations regarding “stand alone” appreciation also apply to using appreciation as preparation for connecting with the Lord. For example, using several positive memories sequentially in order to build appreciation “momentum” helps in this context just as it does with “stand alone” appreciation.
- When talking to the Lord about your pain, it is important to focus on *yourself*, especially focusing on the painful thoughts that feel true and the negative emotions you are experiencing. Focusing on the person(s) you are upset with, and describing to the Lord all the reasons why they are bad and wrong, is actually counterproductive.
- It can be important to tell the Lord about your anger, as part of feeling that you are getting to express all your negative emotions and feeling that the Lord is hearing you, but in most situations it is helpful to then move from talking about your anger to talking about your pain. There are some exceptions, but in most situations we use feeling anger and talking about anger as a defense to protect ourselves from feeling more painful negative emotions, such as shame, powerlessness, sadness, despair, etc.
- When I use this “regaining access to my relational connection circuits” tool I also find it helpful to keep reminding myself that my goal in this exercise is to perceive the Lord’s presence, tell Him about my pain, and receive His attunement. My goal is *not* to fix the problem that is upsetting (triggering?) me, or even to find and resolve the underlying trauma. My goal is to perceive the Lord’s presence, tell Him about my pain, *and receive His attunement so that I can get my relational connection circuits back on line*.
- Even though my goal is *not* to do the whole job of working through underlying memories, my perception is that it's still helpful to be aware of the possibility that triggered underlying trauma may be contributing to the upset. In my experience, this understanding helps with finding the right words to express myself to the Lord. If I am trying to make my words make sense/fit into the present situation, but some portion of the upset is coming from old

memories, I will resist the words that most accurately express the painful thoughts and emotions that are *feeling* true. And my experience is that I am most likely to *feel* that the Lord hears me, understands me, and is *with* me in my difficult situation when I get the words that most accurately express my pain. If I am insisting on words that make sense in the present, and therefore also resisting the words that actually feel true, this seems to hinder my ability to receive the Lord's attunement. Even when I'm not trying to do the whole job of working through the underlying trauma, if I am aware that the upset could be coming from old memories then I'm much more able to recognize and accept words even when they don't seem to fit/make sense in my present situation.

This point especially makes sense if I formulate the situation as "I need to feel and receive the Lord's attunement from *inside* any memories that are being triggered." If some significant portion of the upset is coming from old memories, but I'm resisting the words that feel true from inside the memories, then to the extent that I'm blended with the experience of being inside the memories I will not feel heard or understood, *and this will directly interfere with feeling and receiving the Lord's attunement.*

- As mentioned above, perceiving the Lord's presence and sensing that He hears me have become easier with practice, and I sometimes skip appreciation and jump right to inviting the Lord to be with me in my pain, asking Him to help me perceive His presence, and then talking to Him about my thoughts and emotions. As also mentioned above, I sometimes do this so I will still be connected to the pain as I receive His attunement, and thereby receive additional benefits. The humbling truth is that at other times I skip appreciation simply because it is easier. As long as I'm still able to perceive His presence and sense that He's hearing me, it sometimes feels easier to go right to telling Him about my pain (and feeling heard and understood), than to try to do positive memory and appreciation exercises when I'm not feeling at all positive or grateful. At least some of the time, and especially when I'm in a really bad mood and there's no one with me to coach me through the appreciation exercises, I find it much easier to go right to inviting Him to be with me and telling Him about my pain. In these situations it feels like perceiving His presence, sensing that He's hearing me, and feeling that He's understanding me are immediately satisfying, as opposed to the positive memory & appreciation intervention that requires a transition that can be hard to make when I'm especially upset.⁵
- In situations where I am having an especially difficult time getting my relational circuits back on line I put all of these tools together (for example, taking an extended walk while going back and forth between deliberately appreciating Charlotte and receiving the Lord's attunement). This can be really hard to do when I am in a foul mood and appreciation is especially challenging, and sometimes I need to persist for thirty to forty-five minutes before I am solidly back in relational mode, but taking the time and energy to do this is really worth

⁵Additional tentative observations: when I'm *really* triggered and my relational circuits are *really* off line, I don't initially feel emotionally connected to the Lord even though He's offering attunement, but it's still satisfying in some way to feel that He's with me, hearing me, and understanding me. Then, as my relational circuits begin to come back on line, I also begin to feel relationally connected and grateful for His attunement.

it if I want to be life-giving when I return to whatever it was that upset me.

- *Choosing* to indulge in self pity and/or bitterness can block receiving attunement from the Lord (or from any one else), and thereby prevent you from regaining access to your relational connection circuits.
- This intervention based on receiving the Lord's attunement obviously won't work if you are not yet able to perceive the Lord's attuning presence. For this to change you will need to work with people you trust and who can attune to you in order to expose and resolve the blockages that hinder you from perceiving the Lord's attuning presence. This will almost certainly involve exposing and resolving trauma that is getting transferred onto the Lord, but can also involve exposing and resolving other issues that can hinder a positive connection with the Lord, such as bitterness, self-pity, and self-protective vows. For extensive additional discussion of exposing and resolving blockages that hinder you from perceiving the Lord, see the "Immanuel Intervention" section of Part V in the "Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who is With Us" series and "Immanuel, an Especially Pernicious Blockage, & the Normal Belief Memory System," both in the "Immanuel Series" section on the "About our Theophostic-based ministry/therapy" page of www.kclehman.com. Also, remember that the alternative interventions discussed above (receiving attunement from others in your community, "stand alone" appreciation, and calming) remain available and effective even as you work towards the goal of being able to receive attunement from the Lord.

Additional reading: For a greatly expanded discussion of the material included in this seminar, refer to the series of essays titled "Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and the God Who is With Us," Parts I through V, in the "Immanuel Series" section on the "About our Theophostic-based ministry/therapy" page of www.kclehman.com. For those of you who do not want to go through the whole 250 pages:

- For discussion of the pain processing pathway, see especially Part II.
- For discussion of relational connection circuits, and how you can help a person bring them back on by being with him in his pain, hearing him, understanding him, and attuning to him: see especially Part II, the discussions of synchronization, interpersonal attunement, and mutual mind (pages 23-26), the discussions of relational connection joy and "returning to joy" (pages 31- 38), and the discussions of staying with negative emotions and maintaining/re-establishing relational connection joy (pages 46-52).
- For discussion of the value of deliberately recalling past positive experiences with the Lord: see especially Part V, pages 39-45.
- For discussion of the value of deliberately appreciating the Lord's goodness and how He has cared for you: see especially Part V, pages 37-39.
- For discussion of inviting the Lord to be with you in your pain, and asking the Lord to help you perceive His presence: see especially Part V, page 7.
- For discussion of "opening your heart to Jesus:" see especially Part V, pages 24-26.

- For discussion of traumatic memories, and how to identify the specific memories underlying a given triggered reaction, see especially the discussion of traumatic memories being qualitatively different and the discussion of traumatic memories being difficult to access in Part III, the discussion of how to access traumatic memories in Part IV, and the discussion of “describe everything that comes into your awareness (your brain works better in community)” in Part V.
- For discussion of the Immanuel approach to permanently resolving traumatic memories, see especially Part V.

Several other essays will also be especially helpful in providing expanded discussion of the material presented in this seminar:

- For discussion of self pity and bitterness, and especially discussion of how to surrender them, see “Judgments and Bitterness as Clutter that Hinders Prayer for Emotional Healing,” and “Deadly Perils of the Victim Swamp: Bitterness, Self Pity, Entitlement, and Embellishment” on the “About our Theophostic-based ministry/therapy” page of www.kclehman.com.
- For discussion of how to identify and resolve the psychological and spiritual issues that hinder you from perceiving the Lord’s attuning presence, see “Immanuel, an Especially Pernicious Blockage, & the Normal Belief Memory System” in the “Immanuel Series” section on the “About our Theophostic-based ministry/therapy” page of www.kclehman.com.