

Becoming a Secure Base and Safe Haven to Others (iii) by making sense of and making peace with our past, ourselves and others



Coming home is a wonderful thing. Home is where we feel safe and relaxed. I am not talking about coming home to our families. I am talking about coming home to ourselves, to be one with who we truly are. Many people are not only far away from home, they cannot find their way back. Mr Tan (previous article) is one of them.

When Mr Tan was a child, his parents tied his leg to a table to keep him out of trouble. This caused grave emotional psychological wounding. He would have felt grossly invalidated by his parents, the first adults he looked to for protection and love. He suffered a strong sense of shame, helplessness, resentment and frustration. He felt powerless against the perceived injustice and tyranny.

Human beings have an inherent need to make sense of or make meaning of our experiences. We need it to move forward. That's when we start telling ourselves stories about ourselves.

The stories Mr Tan told himself then and which perpetuated were: 'I am not good enough as I am. Something is wrong with me. That's why my parents do that to me.' The stories we tell ourselves are mostly distorted. Yet they would shape our thoughts and beliefs, affecting our sense of self and

perception of others. The tainted thoughts and beliefs dictate our behaviours, affecting how we show up in all of our relationships, and hence how people experience us.

In Mr Tan's case, he would have shown up from the place of 'I am not deserving of being loved', 'I am such a burden to my parents that they need to control me'. It is a place of deep distrust of self and others. This not only caused him self-hate and self-rejection, it held him back from forming authentic emotional connections with others, including his future spouse.

Mr Tan became a big bully to his younger siblings after their parents' deaths. He subjected them to harsh domination and physical abuse. Unaware to him then, he unconsciously harboured a warped sense of jealousy against them for enjoying the care and freedom he never had.

Warped as it might have been, it was Mr Tan's way of coping with his trapped inner pain. He displayed a strong need to be in control and to prove himself to earn approval. So, he came across as someone boastful and competitive. He was hypervigilant and intense and would fly into a rage easily, at the slightest hint of being invalidated or disrespected.

These were Mr Tan's coping strategies borne out of the wounded child who felt victimised. These coping behaviours evolved over time out of his vulnerability and his instinctive need to survive. They served the function of reducing his pain and protecting himself from further harm. They were not consciously devised. Constant use of these strategies got hardwired into his brain. They became his default mode of coping.

If Mr Tan were honest and courageous then, he would have admitted to being in constant inner conflict. He was not at peace with himself nor with others. When we don't feel safe with ourselves, we cannot build healthy relationships and be a secure base or safe haven to others in our lives.

Connect-Point

***'What happened to us as children is not as important as whether we have made sense of it as adults.'* (Author, Lisa Olivera)**

We can identify with Mr Tan if we are honest with ourselves. If we had painful childhood or past experiences that have remained unprocessed and unresolved, we can expect the patterns that unfolded in Mr Tan's life to also appear in ours. These patterns will continue until we pause to *make sense* of what happened to us and *make peace* with whatever and whoever brought on those patterns.

The track of making sense of our experiences of our stories, thoughts and beliefs and that of making peace with ourselves and those who have hurt us, run parallel to each other. The end goal of these tracks is coming home to ourselves. The by-product is healing.

Healing is often misconstrued. In this context, it is not about getting perfect or getting fixed. It is not forgetting, erasing or undoing. As we gently confront ourselves to make sense of ... as we make peace with ... we are being healed.

A precondition for healing is 'willingness'; a willingness to take personal responsibility (previous article), a willingness to apply honesty and courage to acknowledge our pain, and say it as it is 'I was abused' or 'I was abandoned' etc. We must also have a big dose of healthy curiosity - a curiosity to explore and examine inwardly. What stories have we been telling ourselves? Who, why, how and what made us come up with the stories? What lies, falsehood and unhealthy thoughts and beliefs have got planted in our minds because of our pain and the need to protect ourselves from further pain? How have they influenced and shaped our sense of self and how we show up in our relationships?

If Mr Tan had embarked on the parallel tracks, he would slowly and surely uncover what had operated out of his subconscious and unconscious. Then he can start rewriting his stories, stories that give new meaning to his past experiences. He would ask himself. "What is a more helpful way of looking at my past?" One possible new story can be; - 'I am not defective or deficient. My parents were stressed and clueless, lacking in effective parenting skills. They were not cruel tyrants. That story is closer to the truth.

In going down the parallel tracks, Mr Tan should not self-criticise, judge, feel ashamed of, despise,

blame or chide himself for his past. He has to learn to honour the stories he had created, the unhealthy beliefs and coping behaviours that he resorted to although they did not work for him. He should even thank his inner child for the self-protection he provided and acknowledge that it was necessary. When Mr Tan is able to say to his inner child, "We don't need to be, for instance, in control anymore. We are in a safe place," Mr Tan would have travelled some way down the parallel tracks.

Not disowning, dismissing or cutting off any part of us is necessary for facilitating the healing process. What we want to achieve is 'integration'. Integrating is accepting all parts of ourselves. It is embracing all the painful pieces, the stories we created, all its effects on us, all that is messy, chaotic as well as the beautiful, into our being. We make peace with ourselves by no more sweeping away, hiding, ignoring or denying but by being open to discovering new parts of us that have always been there but which we never saw before.

Mr Tan should also allow himself to grieve over the loss of a childhood he had only read in books, over the emotional connections he never had with his parents and a whole host of other things.

He has to learn to let go of his expectations, disappointment, grievances, shame, resentment, bitterness etc through releasing forgiveness to those who have hurt him.

He has to forgive himself too for disowning and rejecting parts of himself, for hurting others. As he accepts and rediscovers the innate worth he has as well as the inherent good that was there but not validated by others, for instance his free-spirited nature, his energy etc that once got him into trouble, Mr Tan should move towards 'I am okay to be me.'

Healing is a process. It is not instant. It is a long unfolding journey of enriching, self-empowering and accepting self more and more. (more about self-accepting in the next article)

The most important relationship, next to the one we have with our Creator, is the one with ourselves. Every one of our stories is unique. How we make sense, make new meaning of them and make peace with ourselves will also be a journey unique to ourselves. When we do embark on that journey, the outcome is certain. We will move towards living truer, more whole, more authentic lives. We can then be a secure base and safe haven to others in our lives.