

Understanding the Validity and Nature of Traumatic Memories within the Context of Biblical Epistemology and Anthropology

In my 26 years of working with survivors of severe childhood trauma within the context of sadistic ritual abuse there has been much debate regarding the validity of what has been referred to by many as 'recovered memories'. First, it is paramount that we understand the distinction between *traumatic* memories, which can be 'repressed' over a period of time due to their negative implications in a persons history, and *dissociated* memories which are the result of chronic childhood trauma. Dissociated memories are not contained or represented in the person's conscious memory due to the very symptomatology of childhood trauma (see: ***What Are Traumatic Memories?*** <https://www.sidran.org/resources/for-survivors-and-loved-ones/what-are-traumatic-memories/>).

There is substantial medical documentation that human beings 'record & store' narrative memories (in contradistinction to traumatic memories) in a different part of the brain (<http://www.trauma-pages.com/articles.php>). Since brain function in an infant does not attain the developmental capacity to begin to rationally 'record & store' life experiences until around 18 months of age, how can we be assured of the validity of those who report what has happened to them in the womb, at birth and early childhood, *before* the developmental capacity of the brain to function in what we understand as memory? The answer to this question is not found in the study of the physical brain, or in the immaterial mind which is a part of the soul, but in the spirit *and* God-imparted breath of life which comes directly from Him as man's Creator.

First, we must understand that man is tri-partite in nature by the creative act of God Himself. Man is spirit, soul and body (Gen. 2:7; 1Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12). Both the spirit and the soul are immaterial; the brain is a part of the physical body. Though related and inter-dependant the spirit, in relation with the breath of life, is distinct and has different functions from that of the mind which is a part of the soul (see ***What is Man?*** by T. Austin-Sparks (http://www.austin-sparks.net/english/books/what_is_man.html))

In God's original creation of man the human spirit is the domain of the in-breathed life of God (Gen. 2:7). The Hebrew term for this God-created breath of life is *neshamah*. Some scholars view the human spirit and breath of life as synonymous. In scripture these two domains are closely interrelated and inter-dependant but not necessarily the same. Tentatively we may conceptualize the human spirit as the domain of both the Holy Spirit and the *neshamah*.

Textual note on Gen. 2:7

The Hebrew word נֶשְׁמָה (*neshamah*, "breath") is used for God and for the life imparted to humans, not animals (see T. C. Mitchell, "The Old Testament Usage of Neshama," *VT* 11 [1961]: 177-87). Its usage in the Bible conveys more than a breathing living organism (*nefesh khayyah*). ***Whatever is given this breath of life becomes animated with the life from God, has spiritual understanding (Job 32:8), and has a functioning conscience (Prov 20:27)*** (emphasis mine).

Study note on Gen. 2:7:

Human life is described here as consisting of a body (made from soil from the ground) and breath (given by God). Both animals and humans are called “a living being” (נִפְשׁוֹת חַיִּים) but humankind became that in a different and more significant way. (NET Bible)

The result of this creative act of God imparting to Adam this “breath of life” into his physical body (which includes his brain) was that man became a living “soul”. The Bible juxtaposes both the term *spirit* for human spirit (Heb. *ruach*) with *neshamah* in Job. 32:8, and the Holy Spirit (Heb. *ruach*) with *neshamah* in Job 33:4. We see from these two passages that this vital essence of man’s identity has attributes. In Job 32:8 this breath of life gives man “understanding” (Heb. *b’n* to discern). This word “*is a power of judgment, perceptive insight and is demonstrated in the use of knowledge*” (TWOT Vol.1, pg. 103).

Textual note Job 32:8:

This is the word נִפְשׁוֹת (neshamah, “breath”); according to Gen 2:7 it was breathed into Adam to make him a living person (“soul”). ***With that divine impartation came this spiritual understanding.*** (emphasis mine) NET Bible

In Job 33:4 this breath of life imparted by God is said to “give life”. This innermost aspect of man’s human identity is the strategic focus of the enemy’s attack upon survivors from conception onward. The result is the sequestering through trauma, dissociation and demonization of this God-imparted capacity to know and connect with Him and His LIFE!

In Prov. 20:27 the word translated “spirit” in most of our versions is not *ruach* but *neshamah*.

Study note on Prov. 20:27:

The expression translated “the human spirit” is the Hebrew term נִשְׁמַת (nishmat), a feminine noun in construct. ***This is the inner spiritual part of human life that was breathed in at creation (Gen 2:7) and that constitutes humans as spiritual beings with moral, intellectual, and spiritual capacities.*** (emphasis mine) Net Bible

This passage gives us amazing insight into the whole definition and meaning of what we understand as “memory”! This explains how a person who has a history of sadistic ritual abuse is able to know what happened to him/her from conception. I have witnessed this phenomenon over the years of working with people with this background.

It is at conception that this God-given capacity to know, perceive, understand is imparted. In the above passage this innermost capacity of man’s identity functions as *the “lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of his being”*. This explains how a person who has a dissociative history and is in the process of reclaiming his/her life from spiritual death and captivity knows what happened to them from conception. Under normal circumstances people who do not have a history of early childhood trauma do not need or are even able to access this part of their history. According to this passage *neshamah* functions as that which gives light or illumination and is therefore defined as “the lamp of the Lord”. For the survivor this vital

function is essential to understanding God's provision for their ability to fully identify and reclaim their lives by *knowing* what happened to them! This is where a person is able to 'see' and begin to understand God's perspective of what happened in the context of redemption, in order to bring truth out of deception, light out of darkness, gain out of loss, and healing out of woundedness. This capacity of knowing and understanding ones' history is not a part of the memory in relation to the physical brain which is a part of the human body. This knowledge only becomes a part of a person's narrative memory in the brain when what has been dissociated is re-associated with a person's present life experience and is no longer sequestered by the powers of darkness or dissociated. According to the scriptures we have cited, the knowledge of ones' history of abuse from earliest infancy comes from the immaterial and spiritual part of our identity which is imparted by our Holy Creator God at conception. I have never witnessed a survivor change the content of his/her history but continues to enlarge as their identity and lives are restored.

When counseling a survivor it is God the Holy Spirit working in relation to the human spirit and neshamah who reveals the things that are hidden in ones' past.

9 but just as it is written,
"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

¹⁰ For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 1Cor. 2:9-11

²² "It is **He** (God) **who reveals the profound and hidden things;**
He knows what is in the darkness,
And the light dwells with Him. Dan. 2:22

² Timothy 2:7 Consider what I say, for **the Lord will give you understanding in everything.** (emphasis mine)

The New Testament terminology appears to unite the function of the Holy Spirit and human spirit in relation to *neshamah* into one domain. This phenomenon is most likely explained by 1Corinthians 6:17: "the one who joins himself to the Lord is one Spirit/spirit with Him.

When working with survivors this understanding is essential to knowing if you are working with the foundational core identity of a person's identity or in the realm of the soul. The soul is the domain of the mind or intellect and is the place where all the 'programming' is anchored. It is at the level of the human spirit where generational principalities and powers are attached which drives the 'programming' and so profoundly affects the mind, emotions, and the will.

Equipped with this understanding any biblical counselor who gains experience in discerning the biblical distinction of soul and spirit will witness progressive restoration of those coming to wholeness and maturity in Christ. In conjunction with this understanding every biblical counselor should obtain some education in the area of traumatology which includes the symptomatology of chronic childhood trauma and its psychological effects (damage to the soul). This will include the physiological effects of trauma upon the developmental phase of the brain. However, in my observation there has been an over-emphasis on the study of the brain and how trauma has affected the brain. This trend by some, in my view, is placing too much emphasis upon a part of the human body which is not the center of ones' identity. D.I.D. is by definition an identity disorder not a brain disorder. When a person dies his body (including his brain) goes into the ground and ceases to function. The person who is a believer goes into the presence of the Lord (2Cor. 5:1-10), awaiting the resurrection of the body.

With reference to unbelievers it is evident from a study of Luke 16:19-31 that after death all of their cognitive faculties, including what were physical capacities of perception on earth in time, remain intact in a person's disembodied state before being reunited with his body at the Great White Throne Judgment.

I am not intending to depreciate all the clinical and scientific work that has been done in this field. What I am saying is that 2Timothy 3:16-17 should be the emphasis. The secular field of enquiry and frame of reference is primarily focused upon the physical and temporal constitution of man in contradistinction to his spiritual and eternal constitution.

In closing I do acknowledge that the human brain is the most profound and wonderful masterpiece of God's physical creation but it is not the center of man's identity nor does it define who man essentially is. Redeemed man's identity is centered in his immaterial 'self' which consists of both soul and spirit. God the Father is the "*Father of our spirits*" (Heb. 12:9). God is the *Creator* of our souls (Gen. 1:26-27 w/ 1Pet. 4:19). The physical brain and the immaterial spirit and soul may be compared to a computer. The brain represents the 'hardware' and the spirit and the soul represents the 'software'. The temporal interface between the physical brain and the immaterial spirit and soul is marvelous and beyond human comprehension! See Psalm 8 & 103.

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