

A New Peace Paradigm

Our Human Needs and The Tangles of Trauma

by Paul K. Chappell

This pamphlet is an excerpt from the last book in the seven-book Road to Peace series, titled *The Transcendent Mystery: A New Paradigm for Understanding Peace, Trauma, and the Human Condition*. I am publishing this excerpt now because when I lecture on this content, people ask me if I have written it down. The ideas in the following pages give us a new and hopeful foundation for understanding many of our human problems, and on this foundation we can use peace literacy skills to heal these problems. *The Transcendent Mystery*, which will be published in 2020, goes into much more detail and expands these ideas in a variety of directions.

Purpose and Meaning

After graduating from West Point in 2002, deploying to Iraq in 2006, and leaving the army in 2009 as a captain, I began working full-time for peace as the Peace Leadership Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. Because of extreme childhood trauma, I developed an obsession with understanding inner and outer peace. One reason I developed this obsession with understanding peace is because I wanted to discover how to protect human societies from people like me, who have suffered from severe agony and whose preferred method of expression is rage and violence. To protect human societies from people like me, and to show how I transformed my rage into radical empathy and journeyed from violence to peace, we must answer one of the most important—yet overlooked and misunderstood—questions of our era. What do human beings need?

When I give lectures I often ask audiences, “What do human beings need? All of us in this room are human, right? So isn’t it important for us to understand what our human needs are?”

I have asked audiences this question many times, and they always start by listing our physical needs. Someone in the audience will always yell out “food.” People will also list physical needs such as “water,” “shelter,” “oxygen,” or “safety.” Occasionally, someone in the audience will say “love” or “community.”

But after asking this question to audiences probably over a hundred times, I have noticed several human needs that they have never mentioned. The first is our need for *purpose and meaning*.

What is more important for humans: food or purpose and meaning? When I taught a peace leadership course in northern Uganda, where people had lived through a civil war, I asked the group of about twenty-five participants, “What is more important for humans: food or purpose and meaning?” They all said, “Purpose and meaning.” One of the participants raised her hand and explained, “Purpose and meaning is more

important than food, because if you have food but don't have any purpose and meaning, you won't want to eat. You won't want to live."

If we have a lot of food, but don't have any purpose and meaning, we will lose the will to live. On the other hand, if we have a lot of purpose and meaning, but don't have any food, we will work very hard to find some food. Someone might say, "Food is more important than purpose and meaning, because if every single human being was completely deprived of food, our species would go extinct." However, isn't this also true for purpose and meaning? If every single human being was completely deprived of purpose and meaning, wouldn't our species also go extinct?

We are the only species on the planet that can commit suicide even when we have food, water, safety, shelter, freedom, and good health. This human vulnerability reminds me of the saying from Jesus: "Man does not live by bread alone."ⁱ This human vulnerability also reminds me of a quote from philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who said, "He who has a Why to live for can bear almost any How."ⁱⁱ In other words, he who has a Why to live for, a purpose in life, can bear almost any How, almost any hardship.

Throughout history, effective peace leaders and military leaders have realized that our need for purpose and meaning is so powerful that many people, if you give them enough purpose and meaning in life, will willingly give up food and safety. They may even willingly die. If a civil rights leader convinces people they are struggling for freedom and justice, they will willingly get beaten up and go to jail. They may even willingly die. If a military leader convinces people they are fighting for their family, country, or freedom, they will willingly give up safety and subject themselves to physical hardships such as sleep deprivation, lack of shelter, and hunger. They may even willingly die.

Psychiatrist and Nazi concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl also understood the power of purpose and meaning. He realized that when a person is in a Nazi concentration camp and lacks safety and food, that our sense of purpose and meaning becomes even more important because it gives us the strength to overcome adversity. In a similar way, the U.S. military teaches that to survive being taken hostage, the most important thing is to maintain a strong sense of your purpose in life to gain the strength to overcome adversity. Like the U.S. military, civil rights leader Bernard Lafayette said the civil rights movement taught people that "in order to remain strong during a kidnap situation, you must maintain a clear sense of purpose in life, and have a motto that states what your life means or some particular value that you have chosen."ⁱⁱⁱ When people lack food, safety, and other physical needs, purpose and meaning can become even more important as a way to compensate for physical hardship.

Belonging

When I ask audiences what our human needs are, another need they have never mentioned is our need for *belonging*. I then ask them, "Is belonging a basic human need? What is more important for humans: food or belonging?"

After giving the audience a few moments to ponder this, I ask, "What is more important for a wolf-pack: food or belonging? Keep in mind that belonging is the

precondition that allows wolves to obtain food, because they are social animals that hunt as a pack, as a community. In a similar way, belonging is the precondition that allows humans to obtain food, water, safety, shelter, and all of our physical needs, because we rely upon a community for our survival. If you put a two-year-old child in the wilderness alone, that child will starve to death.”^{iv}

The following diagram depicting Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs shows how he got it backward. Although he lists physical needs such as food and safety as coming before belonging, the opposite is true. Since the time of our earliest ancestors until today, belonging to a community has been the foundation that has allowed humans to obtain food and safety.

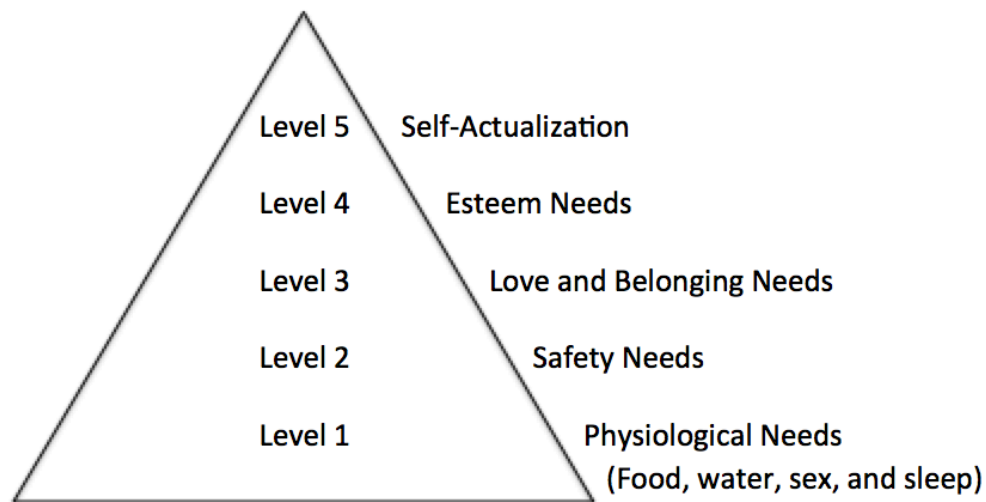


Figure 1: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Showing how Maslow got it backward, psychologist Pamela Rutledge explains why belonging, in the form of social connection and collaboration, is actually a basic need that must be satisfied before humans can obtain food and safety:

Maslow’s model, as its name suggests, organizes groups of human needs into levels in a hierarchical structure, forming a pyramid. It’s similar in some senses to video games in that you have to fulfill the requirements of one set of needs before you can level up. But the same things that make Maslow’s model cognitively appealing—that sense of order and predictability— also make it wrong. If only life were so simple .

..

Here’s the problem with Maslow’s hierarchy. None of these needs [such as food and safety]—starting with basic survival on up—are possible without social connection and collaboration. None of Maslow’s needs can be met without social connection. Humans are social animals for good reason. Without collaboration, there is no survival. It was not possible to defeat a Woolly Mammoth, build a secure structure, or care

for children while hunting without a team effort. It's more true now than then. Our reliance on each other grows as societies become more complex, interconnected, and specialized. Connection is a prerequisite for survival, physically and emotionally . . .

Needs are not hierarchical. Life is messier than that. Needs are, like most other things in nature, an interactive, dynamic system, but they are anchored in our ability to make social connections. Maslow's model needs rewiring so it matches our brains. Belongingness is the driving force of human behavior, not a third tier activity. The system of human needs from bottom to top ... are dependent on our ability to connect with others. Belonging to a community provides the sense of security and agency that makes our brains happy and helps keep us safe.^v

What is the most common characteristic that all serial killers and mass shooters have in common? In his book *Female Serial Killers*, Peter Vronsky says that "social isolation—loneliness—might be arguably the *most* common characteristic of the childhood of serial killers."^{vi} A lack of belonging in the form of social isolation, loneliness, or alienation is also common among mass shooters. So what is more important for humans: food or belonging? People do not become serial killers or mass shooters because they lack food. But people can become serial killers or mass shooters because they lack belonging.^{vii}

Self-Worth

When I ask audiences what our human needs are, another need they have never mentioned is our need for *self-worth*. I then ask them, "Is self-worth a basic human need? What is more important for humans: self-worth or staying alive?"

After giving the audience a few moments to ponder this, I say, "It depends on the person," and then I discuss how people can prioritize self-worth over staying alive.

Roman general Julius Caesar, who became emperor of Rome through military conquest, said, "Prestige has always been of prime importance to me, even outweighing life itself."^{viii} Caesar prioritized prestige, status, and self-worth more than his life, and this was reflected in his actions. He risked his life in war to protect and increase his prestige, status, and self-worth.

Caesar is not unusual, because in cultures around the world, many people have made a comparison between self-worth and life itself. In Judaism there is a traditional idea that humiliating people is akin to murdering them, which can describe the pain that people in the modern world feel when they are bullied and publicly humiliated. According to Rabbi Aryeh Citron, "One should be extremely careful to never shame another in public. This sin is akin to murder; just as blood is spilled in the act of murder, so too when one is shamed the blood drains from his face."^{ix}

This comparison of humiliation and murder is not just metaphorical, because throughout human history many people who were humiliated would kill themselves, or they would respond to humiliation by risking their lives to regain their sense of self-

worth. During the Trojan War, the Greek soldier Giant Ajax felt humiliated and betrayed by his comrades. As a result, he fell on his sword and killed himself. When the samurai in medieval Japan were humiliated and their “honor” was wounded (“honor” back then was equivalent to “self-worth”), many of the samurai would kill themselves through ritual suicide. If you were to insult and humiliate a man in Europe or the United States during the eighteenth century, endangering his honor and self-worth, he might risk his life by challenging you to a duel.^x

Furthermore, when people today are bullied, humiliated, and their self-worth is wounded, some of these people kill themselves, and many of these people might not kill themselves, but they at least think about killing themselves. If bullying is unable to harm someone’s sense of self-worth, then suicidal thoughts are unlikely to occur as a result of being bullied. But if someone who is bullied feels worthless to the point of hating oneself, then suicidal thoughts are likely to occur. To perform a thought experiment that shows how self-worth is a basic human need, imagine if I had a magic dial that could control your sense of self-worth. If I turned the dial so low that you felt completely worthless and even hated yourself, it is likely you would think about killing yourself, even if all of your physical needs were met.

Although it is becoming more common for girls to bully each other with acts of physical aggression, girls in the past more often relied on social aggression. Self-worth is such a vulnerable part of the human condition that women in many cultures target and attack the self-worth of other women, sometimes in an attempt to destroy their lives or induce suicidal thoughts. In her book *Social Aggression Among Girls*, Marion K. Underwood describes the intense pain that can result from attacks upon one’s self-worth:

When adolescent girls engage in social aggression, they are enacting their wrath by hurting what other girls strongly value within the very domain that is often their own focus of concern [such as self-worth or relationships]. When seeking revenge, nothing may satisfy more than hurting someone in the arena in which you yourself feel most threatened . . . The evidence to date suggests both that social aggression is fairly widespread among adolescent girls and that it is perceived as extremely hurtful. In a large-scale survey with more than 6,000 secondary students in Great Britain, 20% of youth reported having been bullied by others spreading rumors about them. Regardless of gender or age, youth reported that the most stressful type of bullying for them was being the target of malicious rumors.^{xi}

Today when people’s self-worth is wounded, they might not kill themselves quickly the way Giant Ajax did by falling on his sword, or the way a samurai would through ritual suicide, but they do kill themselves slowly through alcoholism, drug addiction, stress, or some other means. There are also examples where people prioritize self-worth over food and health, even at the expense of staying alive. One example is

anorexia, which can affect men and women, although it affects far more women than men.

According to a study by the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, five to ten percent of people with anorexia die within ten years, eighteen to twenty percent of people with anorexia die within twenty years, and only thirty to forty percent of people with anorexia ever fully recover.^{xii} Anorexia is a tragic example where people prioritize self-worth over food, health, and in some cases even staying alive. Anorexia can also be about the desire to have control in one's life, which I will address later when discussing the *tangles of trauma*.

Self-worth is a primary driver of human behavior. Think of how much human behavior is driven by people simply wanting to feel worthy rather than worthless. In countries that have speed limits, why do so many people have a desire to own Lamborghinis and Ferraris? A person can appreciate these vehicles as works of art, but for the most part these luxury cars are status symbols that increase people's sense of self-worth. And consider the pressure that many high school students are under to get accepted to Harvard or Yale. A person can have a very happy, meaningful, fulfilling, and successful life without going to Harvard or Yale. The pressure that high school students feel to get accepted to a prestigious university has a lot to do with their self-worth (or the self-worth of their parents).

There are harmful side effects when we live in a society that values our worth based on how much money we make. If we make a lot of money, many people in our society view us as worthy, even if we lack empathy, integrity, and a sense of service to others. If we make little money, many people in our society view us as worthless, even if we have outstanding personal qualities. This is something we can change by improving our society's value system. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We are prone to judge success by the index of our salaries or the size of our automobiles, rather than by the quality of our service and relationship to humanity."^{xiii}

Explanations

When I ask audiences what our human needs are, another need they have never mentioned is our need for *explanations*. As far as we know, when lightning strikes the ground we are the only species that asks "why?" Every culture has explanations for lightning, natural disasters, and the origin of humanity. When bad things happen to us, we also have a need to ask "why?" Our way of explaining why bad things happen to us can include a wide variety of explanations, such as luck, fate, or karma, which are human concepts.

When people have problems in romantic relationships, they also have a need for explanations. Why did this person betray me? Why doesn't this person like me? Why is this person upset today? Why am I having relationship problems with this person? As far as we know, fruit flies don't ask those kinds of questions.

If you ever doubt that human beings have a need for explanations, look at how people react when a terrorist attack happens. Practically everyone wants to find an explanation (even if the explanation is as general as "evil"), which gives those in power

an opportunity to spread misleading explanations. When a mass shooting happens in the United States, people can debate whether it was caused by mental illness, an evil gene, not enough gun control, too much gun control, violent media, bad parenting, bullying, or a combination of factors. When our economy descends into a recession, there is always an intense debate to explain why.

Our need for explanations is so powerful that if people don't have an accurate explanation, they will come up with an inaccurate explanation. People in medieval Europe lacked microscopes and did not know about viruses and bacteria. Needing an explanation for the cause of plagues, many Europeans said plagues were caused by God or the planets. In *The Cosmic Ocean* I discuss the dangers of inaccurate explanations, not only in terms of preventing us from understanding and solving the root causes of our problems, but also in terms of sustaining injustice, since unjust policies are always based on inaccurate explanations.

Frederick Douglass, who was born a slave in 1818 and later became an advocate for women's rights and the abolition of slavery, describes one of the inaccurate explanations that sustained state-sanctioned slavery in America: "[As a child I wondered] why am I a slave? Why are some people slaves and others masters? These were perplexing questions and very troublesome to my childhood. I was very early told by some one that 'God up in the sky' had made all things, and had made black people to be slaves and white people to be masters ... I could not tell how anybody could know that God made black people to be slaves." ^{xiv}

When people who suffer from childhood trauma wonder, "Why me?" or "Why did this happen?" it is because they crave an explanation.^{xv} When children blame themselves for their parents' divorce, it is also because they crave an explanation, even if the explanation is inaccurate. An abused child can come up with many inaccurate explanations, including, "This person abused me because I am bad and deserve it." The book *Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents*, written by Judith A. Cohen, Anthony P. Mannarino, and Esther Deblinger, tells us:

Following a traumatic event, children typically search for an explanation for why something so terrible has happened to them or their loved ones. If no rational explanation is found, children may develop *inaccurate* or *irrational cognitions* about causation in order to gain some sense of control or predictability. A very common irrational belief involves children blaming themselves, either by taking responsibility for the event itself ("He sexually abused me because I wore a dress") or for not foreseeing and avoiding the event (e.g., "I should have known Dad would be in a bad mood—why didn't I warn Mom to be especially nice so he wouldn't have beaten her up?"; "I should have stopped my brother from going to school today so he wouldn't have gotten shot on the way home").

Alternatively, although not blaming themselves directly for the traumatic event, children may come to believe that they are bad, shameful, or otherwise lacking in some way that "justifies" bad things

happening to them [such as the explanation] “I must be stupid for this to have happened to me.” In this manner the world remains fair, predictable, and makes sense . . . Developing realistic cognitions of responsibility (i.e., blaming the parent perpetrator) is often more difficult and painful for children than blaming themselves.^{xvi}

Explanations create our worldview. All animals, including human beings, have physical needs for their survival, but human beings have some unique psychological needs for their survival that no other animal seems to have. One of these unique psychological needs is that we must have a worldview, which can consist of political, religious, scientific, philosophical, or cultural beliefs. This need for a worldview is so powerful that if you threaten someone’s worldview, they will often react as if you are threatening their physical body. Because if your worldview, or in other words *everything you believe to be true*, ends up not being true, the disillusionment you experience might be so severe that you will be at risk of committing suicide or going insane.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs does not mention humanity’s need for a worldview as basic to our survival.^{xvii} What is more important for human beings: having a worldview or staying alive? Human beings cannot live without a worldview, because an adult human brain cannot function without it. This is why children naturally start forming their worldview at a very early age when they seek explanations by asking countless questions. Because our brains cannot function without a worldview, many people would rather die than lose their worldview. Many people would rather die than lose their religion, which comprises a large part of their worldview. As John Steinbeck says in *The Grapes of Wrath*, human beings are the only species on the planet that will die for an idea.^{xviii}

Because we can react to a threat upon our worldview as if our physical body is being threatened, this is one reason why the Roman Catholic Church threatened Galileo and censored his ideas when he said the earth revolved around the sun. He had threatened their worldview. This is also why it can be so difficult to challenge people’s views on politics and religion without them becoming aggressive. Have you ever seen someone become aggressive over a discussion about politics or religion? Perhaps you have seen this happen more often than you can count.

Usually this aggression takes the form of *posturing* (what I describe as “warning aggression” in *The End of War* and *The Cosmic Ocean*), but sometimes this aggression can become lethal, since there are examples in history where people have been willing to risk their lives and kill others in order to protect their political or religious worldview. Furthermore, just as the “flight response” causes many animals to create distance between themselves and a threat when their bodies are in danger, many people will simply walk away from you, unfriend you on Facebook, or create distance in another way when you endanger their worldview.

I meet many well-meaning people who say, “I often give people facts and evidence, but people don’t seem to care about facts and evidence when it contradicts what they believe.” What we must understand is that a worldview can function like a force field, and facts and evidence can bounce off that force field. A human being is not

a computer that automatically absorbs the information we type into it. Unlike human beings, computers don't have a worldview that consists of political, religious, scientific, philosophical, or cultural beliefs.

In *The Art of Waging Peace* I discuss how we can tie new ideas into people's existing worldview, rather than directly attacking their worldview. In the full version of *The Transcendent Mystery* I will discuss how human beings actually share a universal worldview that transcends religion, nationality, and culture, which many people do not know about, and how we can harness the power of this universal worldview to create a more peaceful and just world.

Our Shared Human Hunger

When we understand our shared human hunger for purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and explanations, we can better understand how Adolf Hitler was able to appeal to people. Hitler offered people purpose and meaning. He also offered them belonging and self-worth through a sense of national superiority. And he offered them explanations. People in Germany wanted to know, "Why am I poor?" Hitler offered them explanations, such as telling them they were poor because of the Jews. He wasn't offering accurate explanations, but people wanted answers.

Understanding our shared human hunger for purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and explanations also helps us better understand how violent extremist groups appeal to people. Imagine you are an alienated Muslim living in France, and you feel like a second-class citizen. You feel worthless. And then ISIS comes along and offers you purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and explanations for why people mistreat you, explanations for why you are suffering, and explanations for how the world works.

Today many liberals, conservatives, socialists, and libertarians view humans in primarily materialistic terms, which can lead to the naive view that if everyone has enough material things, we are all going to be happy and live in peace. But that is not how humans actually are. For example, many people in Hollywood have a lot of money, physical luxuries, fame, and prestige, yet these people can still suffer from drug addiction, alcoholism, depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts. These problems can affect people from all walks of life.

If having enough material things made people happy and peaceful, then why does extremism exist? Osama bin Laden was very wealthy and the September 11th hijackers were not living in material poverty. Throughout history in every culture, the people who initiate wars have usually been members of the upper class.

In my early twenties I read psychologist Erich Fromm, whose critique of Sigmund Freud reminded me of the leadership lessons I learned in the military, where I learned that people will die for purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, or an idea. Freud basically said that our human problems come from trying to fulfill our physical needs, such as our need for food, water, safety, and sex. But Erich Fromm said that Freud was incorrect. Fromm said that when human beings have satisfied all of our physical needs, that is not when our problems end. Instead, that is when our problems truly begin.^{xix}

The *Iliad* was written almost three thousand years ago. There is a scene in the *Iliad* where Zeus, king of the gods, is looking upon humanity, and he says, "There is nothing alive more agonized than man of all that breathe and crawl across the earth."^{xx} So three thousand years ago, people realized that no other species on the planet has the range of psychological problems that humans have. No other species on the planet suffers from alcoholism or drug addiction. No other species on the planet, as far as we know, looks in the mirror and says, "Oh no, I have a gray hair," or "I don't like how these pants make me look." No other species on the planet is joining ISIS or neo-Nazi groups. All of their members are humans. There aren't any chimpanzees or dolphins in ISIS.

Furthermore, no other species on the planet has anything like human religion, while every human culture either has religion, or something that looks a lot like religion. Throughout history, religion has given people purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and explanations. When people get their purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and explanations from a national leader or political party, they can worship a national leader or political party in a way that resembles religion. Sports can also emulate some aspects of religion. As someone once told me when describing the popularity of football in the United States, "Sunday used to belong to God. Now Sunday belongs to football."

To gain a deep and practical understanding of extremism, trauma, and the nature of human happiness, and to solve our national and global problems in the twenty-first century and beyond, we need a realistic and pragmatic model of the human condition that is more accurate than Maslow's over-simplistic hierarchy of needs.

Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, discusses how Maslow's hierarchy of needs oversimplifies the complexity of the human condition:

Native American scholar and child welfare expert Terry Cross (2007) reinterprets Maslow's hierarchy of needs through indigenous eyes to create the relational worldview principles . . . For example, Cross (1997) argues that physical needs are not always primary in nature as Maslow argues, given the many examples of people who forgo physical safety and well-being in order to achieve love, belonging, and relationships or to achieve spiritual or pedagogical objectives. The idea of dying for country is an example of this as men and women fight in times of war. Cross (1997) believes that spirituality is the unique force differentiating human life from other forms of life, defining our individual and collective experience. Spirituality should not be misinterpreted to mean organized religion alone; rather it is a personally defined force that centers one's sense of self, community, and world across time.^{xxi}

Maslow expressed criticism of his own theory. According to Fiona Wilson, a professor of organizational behavior: "Maslow's theory lacks empirical support (Wahba and Bridwell, 1976), as Maslow himself admitted when, in 1962, he wrote: 'My motivation theory was published 20 years ago and in all that time nobody repeated it, or

tested it, or really analysed it or criticized it. They just used it, swallowed it whole with only the minor modifications.”^{xxii}

In his August 30th 1962 journal entry, Maslow further said: “This a.m. finally dictated a little bit about being cautious with the overextensive use in business of my theories and findings. They’re being taken as gospel truth, without any real examination of their reliability, validity. The carry-over from clinic to industry is really a huge and shaky step, but they’re going ahead enthusiastically and optimistically . . . I *must* publish the critiques . . . of my motivation theory. Even so, I must expect to be blamed for all the mistakes of these enthusiasts if any real discrepancy or contradiction turns up. Then I’ll really get hopped on as an unscientific optimist. Oh, well! There’s no avoiding that.”^{xxiii}

When I ask audiences what our human needs are, they tend to focus only on material needs, the bottom of Maslow’s hierarchy. After asking audiences what our human needs are probably over a hundred times, one person eventually said “belonging” (sometimes people would say “community” or “love,” which are vague terms for reasons I will discuss in the full version of *The Transcendent Mystery*). But as of writing this, no one has yet said purpose, meaning, self-worth, or explanations. However, when I list these needs, it usually sounds obvious to the audience, and after my lectures people have told me, “It sounds like common sense! Why didn’t I think of that?” Perhaps Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and other societal messages have confused and suppressed our common sense and intuition. When I say that purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and explanations are basic human needs, people already know all of this on an unconscious level. They just don’t know they know it.

Two Kinds of Poverty

What this reveals is that there are two kinds of poverty. The first kind of poverty is *material poverty*. The second kind of poverty is what we can call *spiritual poverty*. As Cindy Blackstock said in her previous quote, “Spirituality should not be misinterpreted to mean organized religion alone; rather it is a personally defined force that centers one’s sense of self, community, and world across time.”^{xxiv}

Spiritual poverty consists of poverty of purpose and malnutrition of meaning. Spiritual poverty can also consist of poverty of belonging, self-worth, and explanations based on truth. Spiritual poverty can occur when we lack a worldview that has high ideals, the kind of high ideals that help us live with integrity, empathy, courage, and an attitude of service to others. When people have unhealthy sources of food and water, we can consider this material poverty. In a similar way, when people have unhealthy sources of purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and explanations that promote violence and injustice, we can consider this spiritual poverty.

People can suffer terribly from material poverty, and people can also suffer terribly from spiritual poverty. However, what we must understand is that the people suffering from spiritual poverty are far more dangerous than those suffering from material poverty. In other words, if a person has unhealthy sources of food and water, that person is not nearly as dangerous as someone who has unhealthy sources of purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and explanations.

Conquerors throughout history do not wage war because they lack food and water. Adolf Hitler did not want to rule Germany and conquer Europe because he was hungry and thirsty. If you were to ask conservatives who are the most dangerous humans on the planet, many conservatives would respond, "The liberal elites." If you were to ask liberals who are the most dangerous humans on the planet, many liberals would respond, "The conservative elites." All of these elites have plenty of food and water. They are not suffering from material poverty.

If we want to create a more peaceful and just world, it is important to not only reduce material poverty. We must also reduce spiritual poverty. Because trauma can lead to both material poverty and spiritual poverty, along with extremism and violence, in order to create a more peaceful and just world we must heal trauma, which is a neglected epidemic in our society.

The Tangles of Trauma

So far I have discussed four cravings humans have that are not physical. The first is purpose and meaning, followed by belonging, self-worth, and explanations. Humans actually have nine cravings that are not physical. I discuss all nine cravings in *The Cosmic Ocean*. I will list all nine cravings below, which we can call *psychological cravings* or *spiritual cravings*, if by the word "spiritual" we reference the quote from Cindy Blackstock that I cited earlier by not meaning "organized religion alone" but "a personally defined force that centers one's sense of self, community, and world across time."^{xxv}

Trauma can become tangled around our cravings for purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and explanations. When trauma becomes tangled around our craving for purpose and meaning, it can lead to a persistent feeling of meaninglessness or nihilism. Like a cord tangled around our throat, preventing us from getting oxygen as we painfully gasp for air, trauma can become tangled around our craving for purpose and meaning, resulting in painful gasps of meaninglessness and nihilism. Like a butterfly tangled in a spider web, our craving for purpose and meaning can become tangled in trauma, preventing us from soaring toward a purposeful and meaningful life. And just as a cord can be tangled around our neck in varying degrees of tightness, or a butterfly can survive for varying lengths of time when tangled in a spider web, trauma can kill us quickly or slowly. Or we can free ourselves from the tangles of trauma.

The following diagram shows how trauma can get tangled around our non-physical human needs, which we can also call spiritual (psychological) cravings. Trauma creates distortions in these cravings. Trauma corrupts these cravings, which can result in behavior that harms ourselves and those around us. I use the metaphor of tangles to describe these distortions and the harm that often results from trauma. This diagram lists these nine cravings in the order that I introduce them in *The Cosmic Ocean*:

When we experience trauma, our spiritual cravings—which serve our survival, make our lives more fulfilling, and center our sense of self, community, and world across time—can become distorted, trapping us in the tangles of trauma.

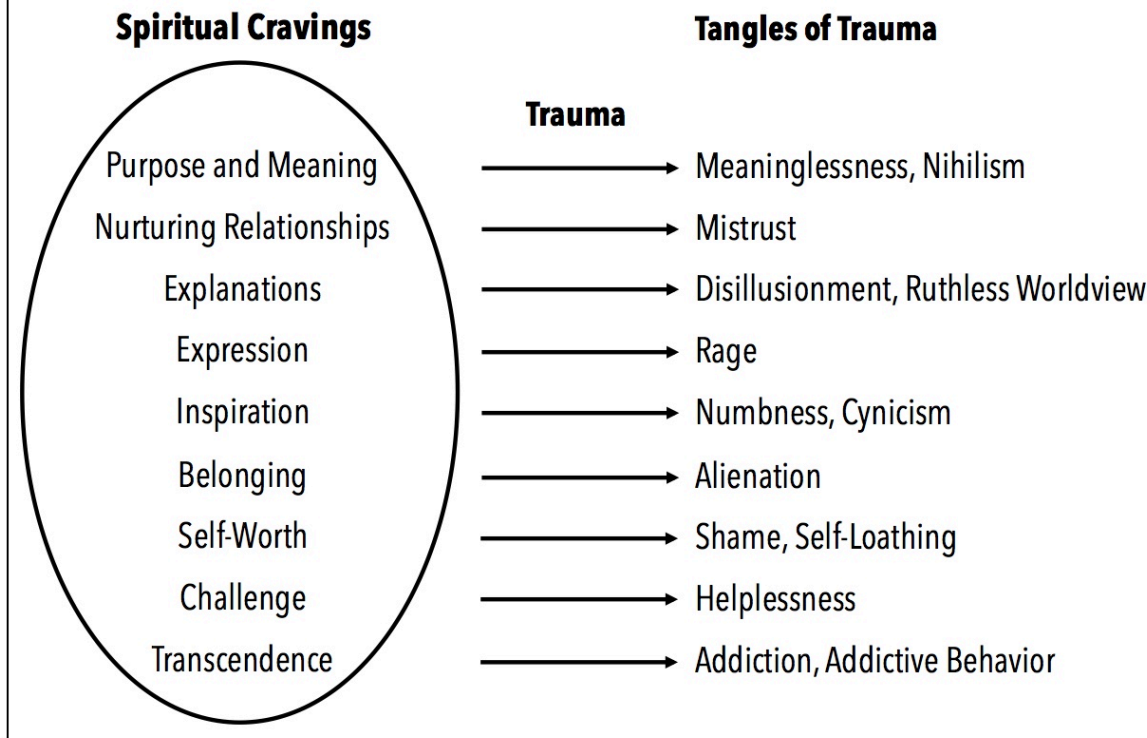


Figure 2: Spiritual Cravings and the Tangles of Trauma

Practically all people have felt meaninglessness, mistrust, disillusionment, etc., at some point in their life because of reasons unrelated to trauma, but trauma can cause these feelings to become persistent and last for years or even decades, changing our personality in dangerous ways. Trauma can strangle us quickly in the form of suicide, or kill us far more slowly, like slow suffocation, in the form of alcoholism, drug addiction, stress, or making our body more susceptible to illness. Using breathing as a metaphor for the human psyche (from which I use the harm caused by constricting our breathing as a metaphor for the harm trauma can cause to our psyche) has an ancient origin. The word “psyche” derives from the word “breath” in ancient Greek. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*, psyche derives “from Greek *psyche* breath, from *psychein* to breathe, alluding to the ancient belief that breathing was evidence that the soul had not yet left the body.”^{xxvi}

When I compare aspects of our psyche becoming tangled in trauma to a butterfly becoming tangled in a spider web, the metaphor of a butterfly was also used to describe the human psyche in Greek mythology. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*, “Psyche [is] the human mind or soul. In Greek mythology, the soul was personified by Psyche, a young woman . . . Psyche is often depicted in works of art with butterfly wings or as a butterfly, because she symbolizes the human soul, suffering

hardship and struggle in life but re-emerging after death in a new and better existence, like a caterpillar reborn as a butterfly.”^{xxvii} When we untangle ourselves from trauma, we can also re-emerge “in a new and better existence” in *this* life and save ourselves from a premature death, like a butterfly freed from a dangerous web.

Because reality is so complex, we can use a variety of metaphors to better understand any aspect of reality. When metaphors are used properly, they make our complex reality appear simple, accessible, and understandable without oversimplifying complexity. Depicting trauma as a tangled cord that restricts our breathing uncovers one angle of the reality of trauma. Depicting trauma as a tangled spider web that restricts our ability to soar uncovers another angle of the reality of trauma. In *The Art of Waging Peace* I depict trauma as a labyrinth, a tangled maze that we can become lost in, which uncovers yet another angle of the reality of trauma.

The words “psychological” and “spiritual” are actually metaphorically related, because they both refer to breathing. Similar to how psychology derives from “psyche,” which means both breath and our human essence in ancient Greek, spirituality derives from “spiritus,” which means both breath and our human essence in Latin. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins*, “Our word spirit is based on Latin *spiritus* ‘breath or spirit,’ from *spirare* ‘to breathe.’ . . . *Spirare* forms the basis of numerous English words including **aspire** from *adspirare* ‘to breathe upon, seek to reach’; **conspire** from *conspirare* ‘to breathe together, agree’; **expire** ‘to breathe out’; **inspire** ‘breathe into’ from the idea that a divine or outside power has inspired you; and **perspire** ‘to breathe through’; and **transpire** ‘breathe across.’”^{xxviii}

Many ancient languages used the same word to mean both breath and our human essence. Similar to our breathing, our spiritual cravings can always be felt but not always seen. Just as we can see our breath manifest when we exhale in the cold air, we can see our spiritual cravings manifest when people exhale through violence in the cold air of rage and alienation.

Just as people will eat unhealthy food and drink contaminated water if they lack healthier options, people will also feed these nine cravings with unhealthy sources (such as destructive ideologies) if they lack healthier options. The tangles of trauma can also compel people to choose unhealthy options, even if they have access to healthier options, because trauma can cause our actions to be guided not by what is best for us and those around us, but by the pain caused by meaninglessness and nihilism, mistrust, disillusionment and a ruthless worldview, rage, numbness and cynicism, alienation, shame and self-loathing, helplessness, or addiction and addictive behavior. As history shows, people can also give up aspects of their freedom to feed these cravings, whether through submitting to an authoritarian government or finding another way to “escape from freedom” (a phrase used by psychologist Erich Fromm).

In *The Cosmic Ocean* I compare these spiritual cravings to organs, because just as the physical organs in our body crave nutrients, but can be fed with foods that vary in nutritional quality, the spiritual organs in our psyche also crave nutrients, but can be fed in ways that vary in nutritional quality. For example, using materialism or violent extremism to feed our spiritual cravings is far less healthy for us and our planet than feeding these cravings in ways that heal the root causes of our global problems and

promote empathy, peace, and justice. Furthermore, just as the organs in our body are interconnected, the same is true for the metaphorical organs in the human psyche. Damage to our pancreas can harm our kidneys, and in a similar way, damage to our organ of self-worth can harm our organ of expression, impairing our ability to express ourselves in healthy ways and inducing rage. Also, when we express rage it can cause us to feel shame. Just as swallowing a sharp object can harm multiple bodily organs such as our stomach, small intestine, and large intestine, a traumatic wound to our psyche can harm our organs of belonging, self-worth, and challenge. This can cause alienation, shame, and helplessness to combine, forming anorexia or other problems.

One reason I developed the tangles of trauma framework is because I have noticed how the word “trauma” is becoming a cliché. If a person says, “I am suffering from trauma,” that can mean almost anything. Imagine if we lived in a world where people could only say, “There is something wrong with my body,” because organs such as the liver, kidneys, and heart had not yet been clearly identified. Just as people are empowered when they know what organs within the human body can be harmed, people are also empowered when they know what metaphorical organs within the human psyche can be harmed by trauma.

Instead of saying, “I am suffering from trauma,” a person can speak with much more precision by saying, “I am suffering from meaninglessness,” or “I am suffering from mistrust,” or “I am suffering from shame,” or “I am suffering from helplessness,” or “I am suffering from rage.” In a similar way, a person can speak with much more precision if instead of saying, “I have pain in my body,” the person says, “I have pain in my stomach,” or “I have a pain in my lungs,” or “I have pain in my heart.”

Everything that people describe as trauma is encompassed in the tangles of trauma framework. This framework primarily deals with the trauma that human beings inflict on us, but mistrust can also describe the fear a person feels toward all dogs after being attacked by a dog. When people suffer from persistent feelings of fear, they can really be suffering from tangles such as mistrust, shame, or helplessness.

Helplessness can describe the fear a person has after surviving a natural disaster, growing up hungry as a child, or not being able to feed one’s family. The most painful forms of fear involve a sense of helplessness, and as I explain in the full version of *The Transcendent Mystery*, human beings are very capable of managing fear when they have nurturing relationships (through people they can trust and rely on) and feel empowered rather than helpless. Helplessness in the face of fear, rather than fear by itself, is linked to the most severe forms of trauma, which can cause the feeling of helplessness to become persistent and make us afraid of living.

Another reason I developed the tangles of trauma framework is because it helps us understand three forms of trauma that cause so much suffering around our world and underlie many of our national and global problems: childhood trauma, war trauma, and racial trauma (the trauma caused by racism and racist policies). I spent my childhood in the midst of the madness caused by these three forms of trauma. Growing up as a racial outcast in Alabama, the son of a half black and half white father and Korean mother, I spent my childhood in the shadow of racial trauma. Growing up in a violent household with a father who fought in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, I also

spent my childhood in the shadow of childhood trauma and war trauma, and I later deployed to Iraq.

The tangles of trauma framework describes the trauma of Achilles in the *Iliad* and the later suicide of his comrade Ajax, stories that are nearly three thousand years old, which show the timelessness of the human condition. This framework also describes how racism can create tangles such as mistrust, disillusionment, rage, cynicism, alienation, shame and self-loathing, helplessness, and addiction. Our parents can pass the tangles of trauma onto us, creating intergenerational trauma that we must learn how to overcome so that we do not repeat this cycle. In addition, this framework shows how veterans can face problems that not only involve war trauma, but also losing their sense of purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, and challenge when they leave the military. Maslow's hierarchy of needs not only oversimplifies the complexity of the human condition, but it also does not address the trauma that has tormented so many people throughout history and continues to torment people today. Maslow's hierarchy of needs does not give us a framework that empowers us to understand and heal these three forms of trauma.

During my lectures I have found that trauma is a topic that interests people regardless of their economic status, race, gender, nationality, or political affiliation, because it affects all of us either directly or indirectly. The United States has the most powerful military in human history, but trauma is a metaphorical ghost that cannot be destroyed by missiles and bombs. Like a phantom that can bypass locked doors and walk through walls, trauma can enter children's homes in the form of domestic violence, being around adults suffering from alcoholism or other addictions, the rage and shame our parents carry with them, child abuse, lack of love, and numerous other ways.

Trauma is an epidemic that is still taboo and largely neglected in our society, partly because people can prefer to repress rather than confront their trauma if they don't have the understanding and skills needed to heal. During my lectures, many educators, community members, and youth ask me how we can better understand and heal trauma, because they realize that our understanding of peace is only as good as our understanding of trauma. To provide a realistic rather than naive understanding of peace, this new peace paradigm helps us understand and heal the tangles of trauma.

We need a much more precise, empowering, and thorough way of understanding trauma, along with a much more precise, empowering, and thorough way of talking about trauma, if we are going to deal with our society's trauma epidemic in a practical and effective way. The word "trauma" is useful as a general term, but by itself it can be so vague that it limits our ability to understand and discuss trauma. Also, we can inhibit the healing process if we allow trauma to become the central feature of our identity. On the path toward healing, I have benefitted from not seeing myself as a "traumatized person" or victim, but instead seeing myself as a human being with many positive qualities who is struggling with the tangles of trauma. These tangles are looser on some days and tighter on other days, and sometimes they seem to go away completely for a long period of time and then revisit temporarily, but never do these tangles define who I am.

Our understanding of peace is only as good as our understanding of the human condition and trauma, and this is why *peace literacy*, a new peace paradigm that educators and I are working to integrate into schools, includes a realistic, practical, and accessible framework for understanding our human needs and the tangles of trauma. Peace literacy also views peace as a skill-set. The skill-set of peace literacy empowers us to feed our spiritual cravings in healthy ways, untangle trauma from our lives and society, heal the root causes of our human problems, and increase realistic peace in our personal lives, communities, country, and world.

ⁱ Matthew 4: 4, Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV).

ⁱⁱ Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon, 2006), 76.

ⁱⁱⁱ Personal conversation with Bernard Lafayette, June 2013.

^{iv} Wolves can sometimes hunt alone, although wolves have a much better chance of surviving if they cooperate as a group. In *Will War Ever End?* I discuss how human beings, more than any other mammal, rely on cooperation to survive.

^v Pamela Rutledge, "Social Networks: What Maslow Misses," <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/positively-media/201111/social-networks-what-maslow-misses-0>.

^{vi} Peter Vronsky, *Female Serial Killers* (New York: Berkley Books, 2007), 47.

^{vii} Usually serial killers and mass shooters suffer from a variety of risk factors, but lack of belonging, in the form of social isolation, loneliness, or alienation, seems to be a risk factor that is common to many mass shooters and serial killers.

^{viii} Julius Caesar, *The Civil War of Caesar*, trans. Jane F. Garner (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), 40.

^{ix} Aryeh Citron, "Hurtful Words," http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1218154/jewish/Hurtful-Words.htm.

^x When people's self-worth was wounded in these examples, they could commit suicide or risk their lives to protect their sense of self-worth not only because societies caused people to internalize this value system, but also because societies exerted pressure to uphold this value system. A modern example is a person in a gang who is publically disrespected and then feels pressure from the gang culture to retaliate with violence.

^{xi} Marion K. Underwood, *Social Aggression Among Girls* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003), 141-142.

^{xii} South Carolina Department of Mental Health Eating Disorder Statistics, <https://www.state.sc.us/dmh/anorexia/statistics.htm>.

^{xiii} *The Words of Martin Luther King Jr.*, selected by Coretta Scott King (New York: Newmarket Press, 1987), 21.

^{xiv} Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Dover, 2003), 29.

^{xv} Sometimes people can prefer to not have an explanation or know the truth if they believe that it will cause them pain or further traumatize them.

^{xvi} Judith A. Cohen, Anthony P. Mannarino, Esther Deblinger, *Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2017), 15.

^{xvii} In Maslow's original paper, he discusses the human search for a "world-philosophy" and "systematizing the universe" (which can be interpreted to mean worldview) as a subcategory

under safety needs or “for the intelligent man, expressions of self-actualization,” but this greatly underestimates the importance of our need for a worldview, which is not only connected to safety but also creates the foundation for our sense of purpose, meaning, belonging, self-worth, culture, and every other aspect of our identity and conception of the world. Having a worldview is not simply about safety, because many people throughout history have risked their lives and made themselves less safe to protect their worldview. Many people have died for their worldview, for their religion, for an idea that makes life worth living. Maslow also says that “curiosity, exploration, desire for the facts . . . are often pursued even at great cost to the individual’s safety,” but he is not really discussing worldviews here, which can suppress curiosity, exploration, and desire for the facts. As I explain in the full version of *The Transcendent Mystery* when discussing the Trojan Horse story (which is a brilliant metaphor for self-deception), people will also risk individual and group safety in order to ignore and suppress facts, to protect their worldview, and to preserve what they already believe.

^{xviii} John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1993), 192.

^{xix} Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990), 46.

^{xx} Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 1990), 457.

^{xxi} Cindy Blackstock, “The Emergence of the Breath of Life Theory,” *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 2011, 4-5.

^{xxii} Fiona M. Wilson, *Organizational Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 125.

^{xxiii} Abraham Maslow, *The Journals of Abraham Maslow*, ed. Richard J. Lowry (Lexington, MA: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1982), 63.

^{xxiv} Cindy Blackstock, “The Emergence of the Breath of Life Theory,” *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 2011, 4-5.

^{xxv} *Ibid.*

^{xxvi} *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. Andrew M. Colman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 613.

^{xxvii} *Ibid.*

^{xxviii} *Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins*, ed. Julia Cresswell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 416.

AUTHOR BIO

Paul K. Chappell is an international peace educator, author of the seven-book Road to Peace series, and serves as the Peace Leadership Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (www.wagingpeace.org). He graduated from West Point, was deployed to Iraq, and left active duty as a captain. He lectures across the country and internationally, also teaching courses and workshops on peace leadership and peace literacy. Chappell grew up in Alabama, the son of a half-black and half-white father who fought in the Korean and Vietnam wars, and a Korean mother. His website is www.peacefulrevolution.com.