When Woundedness Heals: Reclaiming the Soul of Caregiving.

Edward M. Smink Ph.D. BCC
soulofthewoundedhealer.com

From Within will Flow Rivers of Living Water

Objectives: Participants will

- gain insight into how woundedness is a gift that can lead to healing and personal transformation
- Reclaim and celebrate the unique gift the chaplain offers as a member of the healthcare team
- be able to integrate the archetype of the wounded healer into the practice of ministry.
An Oxymoron: When Woundedness Heals

- Why as Chaplains are we interested at all about woundedness?
- What insights emerge from scripture, literature, or our everyday experiences that give us some meaning and understanding of the nature of woundedness?
- The ancients before us imagined this seemingly contradiction in the archetype of the wounded healer.

What is an archetype?

Archetypes are, according to Jung “factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterized as archetypal, but in such a way that they can be recognized only from the effects they produce.” (CW 11: 222).

Exploring the effects they produce is the objective of this presentation. Seeking a greater understanding.

What is the archetype of the Wounded Healer?

The wound cries out for attention and healing. The wound then becomes a reminder, a voice of a lived experience in the present or in the past. As Dennis Slattery suggests in The Wounded Body, Remembering the Markings of Flesh, “wounding is one way the body shows its hyperbole, a way of drawing our attention to it in unexpected ways” (11).
Carl Kerényi in Asklepios, Archetypal Image of the Physician’s Existence maintains that the woundedness of the healer is like a fountain of knowledge in which the healer forever partakes. In mythic thought, healing power and woundedness are inseparable, hence the reality of a wounded-healer (99).

He writes:
Wounding and being wounded are the dark premises of healing: it is as if they make the profession possible and indeed a necessity for human existence. For this existence may, among other possibilities, be conceived as that of a wounded and vulnerable being who can also heal ( . . . ) it is only man’s wounds that can be healed, not man himself. (76)


Greek Mythology

An example in Greek Mythology of a wounded-healer is the divine physician Chiron, the centaur and teacher of the renowned physician Asclepius.

The centaurs were creatures with the bodies of horses and with chests, arms, shoulders and heads of men, who descended from Apollo.

Mythos attempts to image the reality of a union between spirit and flesh, reason and instinct that are components of each person. Animal, human, and divine instincts are combined in the image of Chiron.

Chiron is a god who suffers an incurable wound inflicted upon him by a poisoned arrow from Hercules.

The paradox of his life was that as a healer, he could cure repeatedly, yet remained wounded, which C. Jess Groesbeck, in “The Archetypal Image of the Wounded Healer,” maintains is at the heart of the mystery of healing (127).


The Still Wounded Healer

Chiron represents something different: the still wounded healer. This suggests a perspective which our wounds are not something to get over, to put behind us, to hide, but an integral part of our being. Not being wounded is true health, as is acceptance that some wounds heal and some do not.

Being wounded is synonymous with being imperfect, with limitations of the flesh. Healing is a mystery and in this mystery is the relationship between woundedness and healing.

The fact that Chiron has an incurable wound becomes a metaphor for all who suffer.

Asclepius-God and Man

Asclepius, the Roman name for the Greek God of Medicine, Asklepios, is as mysterious as the art of medicine itself.

Spanning more than 1000 years of history, from primordial sagas and heroic tales, to a deified mortal and god, the legend of Asclepius more than any other Greek or Roman god captures the imagination and needs of those who seek his help.

Ancient physicians like Asclepius were considered to participate in the godly and divine acts of healing.

Kerényi, in quoting the *Decorum* in *Asklepios Archetypal Image of the Physician’s Existence*, suggests that it is the physician’s awareness of the divinity of his healing art “which transplants wisdom into medicine and medicine into wisdom. And the physician who is a lover of wisdom is the equal to a god” (182)
The oracle of Apollo is at the heart of the healing rituals throughout ancient times. When someone was sick, they did not seek a human clinician alone, but a divine one since it was believed that illness was caused by the gods. Since sickness was caused by a divine action, it could only be cured by a god or other divine action, writes Carl A. Meier in *Ancient Incubation and Modern Psychotherapy* (4). Thus the oracle of Apollo applies: “He who wounds also heals.”

Asclepius, who saw the light of the world through the saving hand of his divine father Apollo, was to save all mankind from the darkness of Hades. He achieved the greatest triumph that the medical art can gain and bestowed upon mortal beings eternal existence.

Zeus, of course, heard complaints from Hades that not many souls were finding their ways to the underworld. He was also worried that mortals who became immortal would replace the Olympian gods. He regarded these acts as interference with the divine order of things. In his anger, he struck Asclepius dead with a thunderbolt. Later he was restored to life by Apollo in the heavenly constellations. Thus he became a wounded-healer.

Plato recognized the importance of the physician as a wounded-healer. In *The Republic* he argued that the most skillful physicians are those who have suffered and learned from a variety of illnesses. Rather than being models of good health alone, they became eloquent examples of the wounded Healer.

“The most skillful physicians, I said, are those who begin in childhood and in addition to learning the art by dealing with the greatest possible number of the sickest possible bodies, themselves suffer from every disease and are not very healthy. I do not think they treat body with body, for then their bodies could never be or have been bad. Rather they treat body with soul, which cannot treat properly if it is or has not been bad.” (99:408c).

The canon of Hippocratic medicine was influenced by the cult of Asclepius. Entralgo lists five developments of Greek Medicine that influence modern medicine today:

1. Disease is not superimposed, but part of an internal disorder within a person.
2. The cause of disease is not due to possession, defilement or punishment, but comes from a natural process.
3. Medicine is not magic but a technique of skills and acquired knowledge.
4. Medicine requires an understanding of the nature of the person *Physis* and knowledge of nature in general, its beginning and foundation.
5. Uniting the technical skills of the physician and an understanding of the nature of all things, the term *physiology* comes into being from this understanding. Medical reason, the logos, and the mythos of reality were seen as one (143-148).

Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig in *Power in the Helping Professions* articulates this fundamental truth about the wounded-healer: “psychologically this means not only that the patient has a physician within himself but also that there is a patient in the doctor (91).


---

**Asclepius and Christ**

- Asclepius is divinized as a mortal-god and even later during the first centuries of Christianity was seen as a prototype of Jesus Christ.
- Parallels to Asclepius and Christ began to emerge early. Both were born of divine fathers and human mothers.
- Each was raised by foster fathers, Chiron and Joseph.
- Each suffered and died and descended into Hades.
- Each rose and ascended to the heavens.
- The serpent, a symbol of transformation, becomes a symbol for each.

---

- Thomas F. Matthews argues there is one remarkable difference, the portrayal of Asclepius and Christ in Art:
  - Asclepius, whose epithet was “epios,” the gentle or kind one, and whose curing mission most resembled that of Christ, lacked an imagery of curing.
  - Asclepius appeared in static cultic poses, occasionally seated but generally standing, naked to the waste, with a pallium thrown over his left shoulder and leading on his staff. (69)
  - Christ is shown in the act of healing.

Uranus: The Egyptian Goddess of Healing

The Seraph on a Staff-Greek, Roman, Hebrew Mythology

Jesus, the Worm and No Man

Cuducus Symbol of Modern Medicine

Christ: The Worm and No Man

- With the rise of Christianity, Christ becomes the new divine physician, the wounded-healer who takes upon himself the woundedness of humankind.
- Christ becomes the Suffering Servant of Yahweh as prefigured by Isaiah 53:5. He is lifted up for all to see (John 3:14) and becomes metaphorically like Asclepius, the divine serpent, a worm and no man, whose image becomes a sign of hope to those who enter into the underworld of darkness, woundedness, illness, and sin.
- Henri Nouwen describes how the mythology of the wounded-healer is present in Hasidic stories and in the Christian symbolism of the Crucifixion, and how the extraordinary healing presence and power of healers was attributed to weakness or woundedness within them (The Wounded Healer 82ff).
- John writes in his Gospel: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14).

What Draws a Chaplin to Woundedness?

Synagogue
Henri Nouwen writes in *The Wounded Healer*: “When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains, but that we can mobilize them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope” (93).


Augsburger writes: “When wound meets wound, there is interpathy and compassion: when healing calls to healing, there is awareness, insight, repentance, change, and growth” (369).


Who is the Healer?

- The archetype of the wounded-healer conveys the inner reality that within the healer is woundedness and within the one who is wounded sleeps a healer.
- There is a similarity to the Buddhist symbol of the yin and the yang which acknowledges within darkness there is a spark of light, and within light, there is a shadow of darkness. (116)