

## **TFT and Veterans: Working with Men Who Kill.**

The vast majority of those who make up the TFT community are healers and teachers of all sorts. Few of us have lived the life of a warrior. Yet one of the greatest services we can offer to our community is to help heal the wounds of violence in all its forms. I hope that this article will help those of us who find ourselves in a place to respond to the needs of those who have experienced first-hand the worst of human activities—war.

I am a man who has never been in a situation in which someone is intending me harm. I am a man who has never been faced with a decision to kill another. I am a man who knows right and wrong from the safety of a family who loved one another and protected children from all harm. I am a man who had found a way to live his choice to not be in the military. I am a man who has helped men who have killed. With TFT we are able to help at the most fundamental level.

What I share with you here is what I have been taught by clients who have killed. I am honored by their trust in working with me and share this in appreciation for all I have learned from them. I have tears as I think about them and about the horror of the killing for any reason. I have to tap to continue. Complex trauma with anger and guilt algorithm allows me access to my feelings and memories without being overwhelmed and I can continue.

### **Be clear about your stance as you approach this work.**

When I talk with young men about planning the course of their lives there is often a discussion of joining the military. Some have more options than others for surviving and succeeding in life. The question that must be answered is “are you willing to kill or to die on command?” The question is not will you kill or die for a cause or because you think it is right. The question is not what you hold so dearly as to kill or die for. Will you respond to a lawful order to act without hesitation? Unless your answer is an unequivocal yes, you will be a risk to yourself, to the man next to you, and to all the men and women who depend on you for their lives. Under what circumstances do believe killing is acceptable? Know your own beliefs, values, and feelings about those who kill before you start. Don’t confuse your position with your clients.

### **You are a helper—not a judge.**

No one knows for certain how anyone will respond or what they will do in a life and death moment until they are in that moment. Give up any moral judgments about decisions and actions others make. As a healer you get to pass moral judgments only on yourself. Even if you are a veteran –don’t confuse your situation with that of your clients. As a therapist your role is to help-not judge your client. Tap for yourself when your feelings are so uncomfortable you need to separate yourself from clients. Using some abstract concepts of right and wrong or any other way you make yourself different from the human being sitting in front of you may help you with your feeling, but this will not help your client. Listen to his request for assistance and make that your priority. Help

your clients tap for grief, anger, rage, shame, guilt, or pain he may have experienced in the past as he felt judged by others.

### **Manage the intrusive symptoms first.**

In America at least as many Vietnam era veterans have died from suicide as were killed in combat. Mostly because they were unable find a way to live with the day to day reminders of their experiences. Turning to alcohol or drugs- or other high risk self destructive behaviors will help avoid the overwhelming feelings but not stop them. Most find a way to cope in time to save their lives, but then they may have other problems to face in relationships or life work. As with all traumatic stress work – manage the intrusive thought, sounds, images, memories first. Help them with the issue they present first before looking for deeper issues. Sometimes you may find there are no deeper issues for them. Others may have to manage their feeling as they adapted and reconciled the experience. Remember physical pain from injuries or wounds can drive the need to self medicate. When the client learns to use TFT for themselves they are no longer controlled by their symptoms.

### **These men are part of a family and a community**

Often when help is sought, it is for relief from the intrusive images and memories, the disturbed sleep, the hyper vigilance, and the over used coping mechanisms of avoidance of triggers in all forms of addictive behaviors. However the call for help often comes when a man has problems in relationships or work. His wife, child, boss, or coworkers may be more aware than the vet himself. of how his attempts to adapt are hurting relationships. Use TFT with the veteran to help eliminate the overwhelming feeling that arise from not being understood or accepted and get in the way of understanding and accepting others. Use TFT with family and friends to help them deal with their overwhelming feelings. Helping a wife accept the reality of the man she loves without losing herself in vicarious traumatic stress or fear can be the best medicine. The problems presented to you may be related to the consequences of your client's action or inaction in combat or at home. Being able to talk to others and think things through is a necessary part of being in any relationship. TFT allows for communication and connecting without the scary feelings stopping them.

### **Understanding and Making Sense of the Killing.**

Military training is designed to prepare men and women to kill and to do so with a sense of purpose and justification. They are trained to expect to be part of the carnage of war. Without this training the psychological casualties would be even greater. Even so after the symptoms have been managed and the relationships addressed some men may be faced with unresolved questions. Questions like:

Did I make an error in a judgment that killed an innocent victim, an ally, or friend?

Did I violate the rules of engagement or orders resulting in illegal or unjustified killing?

Did I step over the moral line I had drawn for myself in who and how I killed?

For some veterans finding answers to questions like these are necessary in integrating the combat experience into a life of joy, love, and health. If you are unfamiliar with these issues be honest about your limits. For example a soldier may wonder about the child he

shot and killed in a specific set of circumstances and is uncertain of his judgment in this action. He may also have questions about if he violated the rules of engagement. In many cases like this one he may need to talk with another more experienced or knowledgeable veteran to arrive at a reasonable meaningful conclusion. Often when the emotional and mental pain and upset has been quieted by TFT questions having to do with these events and meaning of life at a spiritual level arise. Stay clear about your role as a healer and know when to refer your client for spiritual counseling.

**Killing is personal and healing emotional wounds that may come from it is an individual process.**

Usually when I write about using TFT I tell a story of a client. But, in this case I want to emphasize an approach which includes an understanding that every man who comes to you will have his own story which will lead you. Be a good healer, therapist, counselor, or helper. Use TFT and anything else you know to help. Please seek consultation and supervision when you are uncertain about what to do next. Remember to take care of yourself, know your limits, seek assistance soon than later, and TAP for yourself as well as your client.

As I have been, I hope you too will be rewarded for your willingness to participate in healing those who suffer and our shared world. Thank you for using your knowledge to help others and following your consciousness in acting to making war an artifact of human development.