Mental Trauma and Healing. Existential Choice or Conscious Construction of One's Own Life (In the Wake of Edith Eva Egert's Book "Choice")

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Abstract

The article discusses two main topics - the nature of mental trauma and the history of healing by Edith Eva Egert, set forth in the book "Choice". At the same time, interpreting and comprehending the material of the book, the author relies on his own "theory of mental realities". In its framework, he characterizes what mental trauma is and what healing methods exist. In particular, they distinguish two main ways: mocking and mimicry under the events of realities lived by man. The author tries to show that the differences he offers make it possible to understand the fate of Edith Egert and the ups and downs that she describes in her book. A specific research methodology was implemented in the work: problem statement, comparative and situational analysis, concept construction, analysis and interpretation of texts. As a result of the study, it was possible to show the applicability of the theory of mental realities, introduce the concept of psychic trauma, distinguish two main methods of healing (recreation, involving direct reproduction of the plots of trauma, and mimicry of these plots for events of current life), theoretically comprehend the book by Edith Eger "Choice".

Keywords: *Trauma; Psyche; Consciousness; Fear; Worries; Help; Healing; Problems; Prison; Meaning*

My oldest daughter, Lena, a practicing psychotherapist, presented me this wonderful book at the beginning of the pandemic. She came in very handy: my wife and I read it, which is called in the same breath, and because the fate of Edith Eger resonated with the atmosphere of fear looming as a result of a pandemic over the world, but also because the book has a lot of material for reflection on our own lives. "Choice" organically combines the story of the amazing fate of the heroine, who survived as a teenager with her sister Magda, the Nazi death camp Auschwitz, and Eva Egert's thoughts, which are close to scientific ones, about psychotherapeutic help for people with deep mental trauma.

Edith included herself among these patients, formulating the corresponding creed and meaning of her life. Having made friends with Victor Frankl, also a survivor of the death camp, the author of the famous book "Man in Search of Meaning", Edith is so aware of his purpose. "Already in his first letter, I feel for myself the prerequisites of what will later be formed into my calling. Here they are: to find the meaning of life in helping others find it; heal oneself in order to be able to heal others; treat others to be able to recover. In addition, Frankl's first letter helps me establish my intention to choose my own path and my own life" [11, p. 206].

The psychotherapeutic concept of the author "Choice" is indicated in the title of the book. Edith Eger believes that before a person who finds himself in a life-threatening situation, or in a situation that has been overwhelming him for a long time, there is always the possibility of choosing that the right choice is a necessary condition for his healing. "In those predawn hours in the fall of 1966", she recalls, "I read these lines, which contain the whole essence of Frankl's teachings: ... Everything can be taken away from a person, except for one - his last freedom: to choose his attitude to any given circumstances, to choose his own path.

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Every moment is a choice. No matter how destructive, insignificant, unfree, painful or painful our experience was, we always choose how to relate to it. And finally, I'm starting to realize that I also have a choice. And the realization of this will change my life" [11, p. 199].

At first glance, everything is correct, but is it not easy to make a simple, but an "existential" choice, because we are talking about such preferences that Danish philosophy and psychologist Søren Kierkigor called "cosmic" elections and "second birth"? It is often unclear what to choose from, and often there is simply no choice, it still needs to be created. By the way, Edith herself shows this: as a rule, in serious cases there is no choice or the choice is made only after this item has been created by the client together with the therapist. For example, she talks about one of her clients, Carlos, who "struggles with his sociophobia and low self-esteem. He is so afraid of being rejected by his peers that he does not run the risk of making friendships or any other relationship".

At the university, in his second year, the mentor makes Carlos scrub the toilet and wear a huge sombrero as a laughing stock to others. Edith and Carros are discussing three ways out of this humiliating situation, but they are not satisfied with Carlos. "By carefully considering possible options", writes Eva Egert, "Carlos is discovering the fourth. Instead of openly confronting the mentor - there is a risk, as he fears that this will result in a fierce fight, - he may complain to someone who has more power" [11, p. 317]. On this option and stop. Edith trains Carlos how he will speak, and as a result, everything ends successfully, it turns out as planned.

Now the question is, did this fourth option exist for Carlos in advance, or did he really "discover" it, build it in the course of joint reflection? The material of the book allows us to state the second. Another example is where amazing healing is done without any choice at all, due to, as Edith herself notes, a rethinking of the life situation. Once, after a lecture, a man approached Edith and asked to speak with his elderly mother, who had complained about everything for many years and was unhappy with everyone. "I", Edith recalls, did not know how I could help her in a single short visit, until the man said that she, like me, had lost her mother at the age of sixteen (mother and father Edith died in Auschwitz before the eyes of their daughters and Eve tormented herself for many years, believing herself guilty of the death of her beloved mother. - V.R.). I felt sympathy for his mother, a stranger to me. It dawned on me that I myself could easily become such a person and almost became one - immersed in the sadness that was hiding from people who loved me madly" [11, p. 275-276].

Edith meets with Margaret, the mother of a man who, not letting her open her mouth, continues to complain about everything for more than an hour.

"- Where is your mother buried? I asked suddenly.

Margaret staggered back, as if I had turned into a dragon and breathed fire right into her face.

"At the cemetery", she finally said, gathering her strength.

- Where is the cemetery? Nearby?

"In this very city", she said.

"Your mother needs you right now" [with. 276]

They order a taxi and go to the cemetery. On the way, Edith explains to Margaret why they are going.

"- Do you know that mothers cannot leave in peace until they are convinced that their children live a full life?"

I asked her to take off her shoes. Take off stockings. To stand barefoot on the mother's grave, Connect with her directly so that she finally finds peace" [11, p. 276].

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The result was amazing. After some time, the son wrote to Edith: "I do not know what you did to my mother, but now she is a different person - calm and joyful".

It was a rush, almost a whim, just a successful experiment. I solved the problem of helping to rethink life, turning the problem into an auspicious occasion, giving it the opportunity to play a role - to provide mother service. Margaret will help her mother and thus help herself" [11, p. 277] (italics ours. V.R.).

Let us dwell on this moment in more detail. What is rethinking, what role does it play? At one time, I analyzed the practice of early Freud and showed that he, too, did not quite correctly explain the nature of his actions. Freud believed that the main thing in psychotherapeutic assistance was to persuade the patient to become aware of the situation that caused the psychological trauma. Patients' awareness of their own traumatic experiences is regarded by them as a force releasing "suppressed", "pinched" affects [3, p. 150-168].

However, further studies of Freud himself and other practical psychologists showed that awareness of the traumatic situation alone is not enough. In an early work analyzed (The Case History of the Freilaine Elizabeth von R [10]), Freud's patient at first refused to accept the fact of her past life revealed by the therapist - namely, Elizabeth's love for her own son-in-law. I am not discussing now whether this fact actually happened. Another thing is important - Freud was sure that he was. This fact was an unbearable idea for Elizabeth: "they say that is not true", she objected desperately, "this could not be, she is not capable of such meanness, that she would never forgive herself". And it is clear that if the patient is not able to integrate the revealed unbearable idea in his mind, cannot rethink it, then no improvement can be said. Improvement or some kind of improvement begins in a situation of rethinking an unbearable idea, when it is possible to look at past events from a new point of view. In fact, when you manage to change your consciousness in the direction of recovery. Indeed, Elizabeth von R. began to listen to Freud's words and change her behavior only after he helped her change the meaning of her actions and desires.

"It was not at all difficult to prove to her", Freud writes, "that her own statements did not allow a different interpretation; but the resistance lasted long enough, until two of my comforting arguments - that, they say, "cannot be responsible for one's feelings and that her illness itself is a convincing evidence of her moral purity" did not have the proper effect on her (emphasized by us. B.R.) [3, p. 172]. But what if Elizabeth von R. decided differently: they say that a person is always obliged to be responsible for his feelings, and the disease can hardly be evidence of moral purity, rather human weakness? Obviously, she herself wanted to recover and, finally, to free herself from the tormenting experiences. And if she didn't want to, or would these experiences themselves be sweet to her? It is unlikely that in this latter case a rethinking of intolerable ideas would take place.

So, the point is not so much in the awareness of the traumatic situation as in rethinking it, in a very definite change in the structures of the patient's consciousness; otherwise one cannot hope for a change in his condition. It is interesting that the development of psychological practice accurately reflected the difference between these two points - awareness of traumatic situations and a change in consciousness in the process of rethinking the life situations of a client. Some types of psychological practice, primarily psychoanalysis, laid the basis for their methods in various forms of awareness and response to traumatic situations. Others are methods of rethinking life situations, as well as semantic and value-based foundations of consciousness (Frankl, Maslow, Rogers, etc).

If Edith exaggerates the significance of the choice (I do not deny its existence, but the choice is probably only the final formal moment of a more complex mental process), then it captures the role of trauma accurately. The material of the book shows that trauma is a very difficult phenomenon, however, Edith's memories allow us to trace, firstly, how the trauma develops, secondly, the negative impact of trauma on behavior, and thirdly, what are the ways and means of healing.

But first, what is injury, from the point of view of the author. I interpret trauma in the "doctrine of psychic realities". The main ideas of this theory are as follows. A person perceives the world and himself not in a single psychic space, but in the form of a multitude of reali-

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ties, which are organized in a kind of pyramid, where the basis is formed by "immediate realities" (perceived by the individual as "what is really"), but based on them "derivative realities" (dependent on the immediate).

Events of different realities (art, dreams, everyday life, science, etc.) are lived by the individual, and this is a condition for his behavior and activity. Reality events are subject to certain logic and conventions, which differ for different realities. For example, in art we allow one convention of events, in dreams another, in everyday life the third, in science the fourth. Realities are the internal conditions of human life and behavior, they are formed in the course of resolving his problems, they involve switching attitudes and methods in the transition from one reality to another.

An important role in the formation of realities is played by "semiotic schemes" (graphic or narrative), as well as self-organization of the psyche, which ensures switching of realities and a change in the conditionality of events. It is schemes that provide a solution to the problems that people realize, they set a new vision and allow you to act in a new way.

For example, the well-known scheme of the Moscow metro allowed designers to organize the flow of visitors, and for passengers to navigate in the subway (choose routes, change from one to another, leave the car at the necessary stations, etc.). As a result, for the Muscovite, the reality of the metro has formed, in which the individual lives certain events that are a condition for his effective behavior. This reality differs by a person from other realities; when going to the metro or leaving it, the individual's settings change, respectively, the events and behavior he lives (the psychic realities and patterns are described in more detail, see [4, pp. 69-113; 5]).

Another characteristic of realities that is important for our topic is this: the pyramid of realities of an individual person determines the organization of his sensuality (sensations and perceptions). For example, in a schizophrenic, the pyramid of realities that is deformed relative to the norms of sociality also defines sensuality different from an ordinary person: he sees and feels in the logic of events his own deformed reality. "Sometimes", writes the Moscow psychotherapist G. Nazloyan, "patients are surprised by the shape of their ear, nose, eyes, lips, chin. This is the first way out of autistic captivity, the first look at oneself from the outside, the first attempt to compare oneself with other people without vicious mythologization and dysmorphophobic attitudes that distort the vision of the world in general and the world of human relations in particular. Sergei V., for whom the forehead was a "training ground", the surface of the nose as a "launching pad", and his mouth as a "cave", finally remembered this with an ironic smile, as, incidentally, a developed delusional system and inappropriate actions related with the fact that he is an Alien from the Future. Another patient, Vladimir U., who has yet to be treated, "sculpts" horses, cats and other animals from his cheeks, and then "erases" them. What is hidden behind all this?" [2, p. 23].

From the point of view of the theory of mental realities, the patient's vision of his face is completely determined by the characteristics of the deformed reality. Precisely because Sergey V. considers himself an alien from the future and, therefore, an astronaut, he perceives his nose as a "launching pad" and his forehead as a "space training ground".

Now, what is mental trauma. Under the influence of external conditions, perceived by a person as a dysfunction of varying severity (up to the constant expectation of death, as in Auschwitz for Edith), the individual invents schemes that explain to him what is happening, i.e. his dysfunction. On the basis of these schemes, he is developing a new pyramid of realities, at the base of which is immediate reality, perceived as the cause of this ill-being. In this case, Edith perceived the reality of Auschwitz as a prison, the expectation of death, a source of inhuman suffering.

"The harsh voice", Edith recalls, "immediately casts it into the past, I again hear the shouts of the German overseer, who loved to remind us that we should work until we die, and whoever survives will be killed later ... I stole a carrot for Magda, and the soldier the Wehrmacht put the barrel of a machine gun to my chest. A sticky fear, from which you are numb and knocking at your temples: I'm to blame for something, they will punish me now, my life is at stake, death is inevitable <...> People ask me how I learned to overcome the past. Overcome?

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Overcome? I have never overcome anything. Every bombing, breeding, death, every column of smoke rising to the sky, every moment of horror, which seemed to me the last - all this lives in me, my memory, my nightmares. The past does not disappear. You cannot step over it; you cannot amputate it. It exists with me" [11, p. 169, 170, 267-268].

Formulated very accurately. I'll try to characterize the injury conceptually. Firstly, trauma is trauma, that is, unpleasant, sometimes very difficult experiences that cause stupor, inhibition, and a halt in normal life. Secondly, trauma has a certain form, structure, expressed in various topics and contents of experiences (in this case, death, prison, fear). Thirdly, what directly catches your eye in Edith's memoirs, the trauma does not go away, does not get rid of it, it, if only, really, it is trauma, has become an integral state of the injured person. The latter can be explained, in particular, by the fact that the pyramid of realities formed under the influence of external influences not only determined the organization of human sensuality (in the case of Edith, pain, fear, tension, expectation of death), but this sensibility was thoroughly entrenched in certain sections of the brain, nervous system, more broadly, the human body (for the distinction between body and body, see [7, p. 183-187]).

Edith's response to injury suggests at least two ways that a person will be affected by injury. The first, directly identified, easily recognized - a literal reproduction of the form (picture) of the injury in those plots and themes that were the original. For example, in the case of Edith, this is a literal reproduction (Eger calls it "resentment") throughout the life of certain episodes that took place in Auschwitz. "In Auschwitz, in Mauthausen, on the death march", Edith writes, "I survived there because I was immersed in the inner world. I gained hope and faith in my inner self, even when I was surrounded by hunger, torture and death. After the first experience, I began to think that demons live in my inner world. That inside of me is a disastrous abyss. My inner world no longer supported me, it became a source of pain: uncontrollable memories, loss, fear. I could stand in line for fish, and when the seller called my name, I saw Mengele's face instead of his face (a doctor who personally sent people to death in Auschwitz, conducted inhuman experiments with them, sent Edith's mother to the gas chamber, ordered Edith to dance in front of him. V.R.). Sometimes in the mornings, going to the factory, I saw my mother next to me, saw clearer than clear, saw her turn her back and leave" [11, p. 172].

In this first method, events that often took place in the distant past were reproduced and experienced again, as if they were being performed for the first time. The question is, how, after all, the situation and conditions were completely different (for example, not a death camp, but work in a factory in America after the war)? The human psyche came to the rescue, recreating through hallucinations (Edith sees Mengele instead of the seller, clearly sees the long-dead mother) those subjects and objects that once formed an injury. It is trauma that is the source of these hallucinations, the implementation of its program makes the psyche create the conditions of perception necessary for the implementation of this program. In the "dream concept" I examined this mechanism in some detail, claiming that hallucinations are one of the options for "waking up". Unlike ordinary dreams, a waking dream is a dream that is realized during wakefulness and is perceived by a person, not as dreams, but ordinary impressions [8, p. 371-374].

The second method of the impact of injury on a person does not lie on the surface; it can be understood by reconstructing the consequences of the injury. In all cases, the trauma program forces the psyche to recreate past events. But unlike the first case in the second method, the human consciousness, recreating past events, is forced to adapt to current life, it seems to be hiding behind the images and themes that are permissible in current realities. Such an adaptation takes different forms: it can be a transfer of past events and relationships to oneself (this is how Edith sets up a prison in herself, believing that she is incapable, incompetent, injured, etc.); endowing their loved ones or friends with traits that do not exist in real life, but are necessary for the implementation of the injury program; attributing threatening properties to the world and so on, much depends on the creative abilities of a person.

"In Auschwitz", Edith writes, "when everything was hopeless, I was not visited by suicidal thoughts. Then there was no day that I did not hear from people around me: "You will leave this place only in the form of a corpse". But their ominous prophecies only gave me

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strength to resist. Now, when I am recovering, when I am faced with the irreversible fact that my parents cannot be returned, that Eric will never be with me, there are only demons tearing my soul apart. I am thinking of ending my life. I want to relieve myself of pain <...> I don't understand yet that my sister's pain is not so much connected with loneliness, but with her conviction that she doesn't deserve love <...> "I can't do this anymore", I say to Bele (to Edith's husband). V.R.) - I cannot live with a target on my back. It should not be that my daughter loses her parents. <...> A feeling of awkwardness even in one's environment, a sense of sentencing to exile - this did not come from outside. Everything is inherent in me. My self-imprisonment comes from the belief that I survived unjustly ... <...> The problem is that I believe in his words about my worthlessness. <...> There is no worse conviction than the belief that troubles and sorrows are all that we deserve in life. <...> It's easy to build a prison on the foundation of pain, on the foundation of the past" [11, p. 125, 139, 145, 174, 180, 221, 268].

Of course, we can say that all these statements and self-esteem of oneself are just metaphors expressing Edith's experiences, they do not relate to the content of the injury, its analogy with prison and self-imprisonment are random. It is unlikely that the fact is that our psyche is a wonderful artist, able to mimic, putting on clothes that are worn and put on everything. So, the second way the impact of injury on his victim involves a similar mimicry and vestment. Therefore, we may not understand for a long time what is really happening to us, as Edith did not understand.
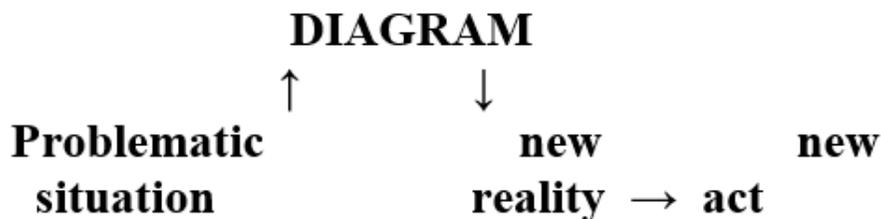
Now we will discuss how such a trauma can be overcome, how healing is possible. I have been interested in this topic for a long time and tried to discuss it in my psychological research. For this, in particular, he analyzed the successful experience in the treatment of schizophrenia in the works of Pavel Volkov and Gagik Nazloyan [6, p. 91-102]. At the same time, I outlined the following three basic conditions for overcoming psychological trauma. The first is the work of revealing the history of the disease and analyzing the patient's personality, without this the second and third conditions do not make sense, since the approach and help to the client in case of severe mental injuries can only be individual, focused on a particular namerek. The second condition is the construction (invention) of schemes that allow you to block the schemes on which the trauma rests and lives, and at the same time open the way for a normal, effective life. For example, Pavel Volkov, working with his client Sveta, who believed that she was being persecuted and did not understand, offered her such a scheme.

"In a generalized form", he writes, "what I tried to convey to Sveta sounds something like this: I know that your actions are understandable, but to whom? To you and me. And to others? Agree that others see only your external behavior, evaluate it by the standard by which it turns out to be abnormal... For hospitalization you need a reason, and you gave it ... you have a choice: either continue to live as before with the same consequences, or behave without breaking written and unwritten contracts, thereby avoiding hospitals...

You cannot exchange souls and personal experiences. We have an option. First: everyone is trying to prove his case, while no truth triumphs and there is a conflict between us. Second: everyone agrees that everyone has the right to their truth and their myth, while at the bottom of their hearts he considers himself right, but in real relationships is correct and builds these relations not on differences, but on similarities. If people don't want a conflict, they should build their relations on common or neutral points of contact, not claiming the universality of their myths" [1, p. 492-496; 9, p. 200].

Based on this narrative scheme, Pavel suggested that Sveta postpone actions that she personally considered correct, and demonstrate only normal behavior, including a gradual return to work in the theater (she was an assistant director) and caring for her beloved daughter. Such behavior and work after three years led to a complete recovery and exit from schizophrenia.

As the author's communication with readers shows, they usually identify the scheme with its graphic or narrative form (supposedly, the scheme is a graphic conditional image of the metro or, for example, the expression "you have a choice: either continue to live as before and with the same consequences or to behave without violating written and unwritten contracts, thereby avoiding hospitals"). It is not right. The scheme is an element of the structure, the clarification of which shows that the problems facing a person can be solved precisely by constructing schemes, that this creates a new reality and vision, as well as the opportunity to act in a new way.

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DIAGRAM

↑   ↓

Problematic situation   **new reality** → **act**   **new**

Before talking with Pavel Volkov, it didn't occur to Svetlana that she herself had aggravated her ill-being, that, based on her theatrical abilities, she could deceive her persecutors, that it was shameful to portray behavior that actually does not correspond to reality. This new vision, as Pavel shows, was not given to her immediately and with great difficulty, she partly went to him only because she was afraid of another hospitalization. Precisely because the scheme is not a simple text, but a real process, involving the development of a new vision, reality and action, the schemes are assimilated in the hard work of the individual and, moreover, if he needs such innovations. If there is no such need, besides, the schemes for the individual are complex and incomprehensible, assimilation does not occur, the scheme is rejected.

If you go back to Edith, you can argue that she also created patterns and built on their basis their behavior. Some schemes helped her survive in Auschwitz, others cope with the trauma. A separate question is how these schemes were realized and formulated, exactly in the form with which we get to know them in the book "Choice", or somewhat differently. After all, since Edith passed the death camp, a lot of water has flowed, and the memory can fail us over time. I have already cited several schemes of Edith above, I will give more. "In the secluded darkness, the words of my mother again pop up inside me, as if she is here in this naked room, whispering through the music: "Just remember: no one will take away what is in your head" <...> I will not exaggerate if I say that I live for my sister's sake. I will not exaggerate if I say that she lives for my sake. <...> ... each of us survived because we were with each other, ready to defend one another and support, and because each of us kept our last strength to be at each other. <...> Survivors can remain victims even after liberation, or they can learn to lead a rich and vibrant life. In the course of my dissertation research, I discovered and clearly formulated for myself a firm opinion that will become the cornerstone of my therapy: we can choose whether to be my own jailers or to be free <...> I survived - to see freedom - thanks to the ability to forgive ... In the best case revenge is meaningless. She cannot change what was caused to us, she cannot erase injustice ... She makes hatred go around in a circle ... Forgive means to grieve about what happened, what did not happen, and part with the desire to have a different past. Accept life as it was and as it is" [11, p. 64, 68, 72, 139, 225, 268-269].

Thinking through the last scheme, you can better understand the features of "healing schemes". If you managed to seriously take the point of view of forgiveness, then it becomes impossible to revenge and the fight against the culprit of your misfortune. Healing circuits block the circuits and reality on which the trauma stands. But the problem is precisely how to achieve a sincere, serious and deep acceptance of healing schemes, because they contradict what the suffering person sees and believes.

To achieve the adoption of healing schemes means to fulfill the third condition. It is easy to understand that in her decision the main burden falls on the therapist. As a rule, healing requires real selflessness from him, because he has been working with most patients for several years. In any case, Edith calls the figure two, three years, and sometimes five years. The psychotherapist has to inspire confidence

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in his ward in a favorable outcome, add energy, endlessly listen to and sort out his doubts, seek arguments to accept the proposed schemes and arguments, become either a close friend, or an authoritative teacher, and much more.

On the other hand, it is clear that if the patient does not make efforts to accept the schemes proposed by the therapist ("put them on", as the methodologists say), then his consciousness is unlikely to transform, without which healing is impossible. He must think through these schemes, clarify their contents, try to put them into practice, see what comes of it, abandon the familiar and obvious. All this suggests, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, a real act, and it is clear that not every person is able to go this way.

In the case of Edith, healing was facilitated by the fact that she chose psychotherapy as her profession and helped not only others, but herself. Recall that she writes: "to find the meaning of life in helping others find it; heal oneself in order to be able to heal others; to heal others in order to be able to heal herself".

Conclusion

From the material examined and reconstruction, firstly, it becomes clear what constitutes a mental trauma. It is formed as a response of the psyche and the whole organism (physicality) to trouble, and the form of awareness of what is happening plays a significant role here. Secondly, a healing strategy is drawn. An important role in this process is played by healing schemes that allow you to block the pyramid of realities that supports trauma. But without the efforts of the personality itself, its actions and hard work in relation to its consciousness, healing schemes cannot be taken and fulfill its purpose. Another conclusion concerns the concepts and tools of the doctrine of mental realities. The author tried to show that these concepts work well, allowing us to understand what constitutes mental trauma and how the healing of a deeply injured person is possible. It is important that the theoretical hypotheses and constructions in the work are based on the reconstruction of the history and work of a remarkable personality - a practicing psychologist Eger Edith Eve.

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