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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | symptoms, etc. Trauma is an illness, and like any other, it is best to tackle it from all fronts. Although therapy IS the best answer (from a qualified, compassionate licensed therapist), an excellent tool that goes hand in hand with that is the Dharma.    It is helpful to remember – Buddha was NOT a Buddhist. His goal was not to start a world-wide religion that endured since 500BCE. Siddhartha Gautama concerned himself with one thing – Suffering and the end of Suffering. Once the Buddha became enlightened on how to rid himself of suffering (dukkha in the Poli language), he shared it with anyone who wanted to learn.    So, Dharma (the truth of things) can help us ease our dukkha, including the suffering we experience from trauma. The Buddhas first teaching was on the Four Noble Truths:   1. The Truth of Suffering 2. The Cause of Suffering 3. There is an End to Suffering 4. The Way to the End of Suffering (the Noble Eightfold Path).     Understanding and living by the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path are comparable to a flu vaccine. Practiced and understood before the trauma happens, these inoculate us to the profound suffering that can arise, minimizing its effects. But does developing a deep understanding of the Dharma help “after” a trauma has occurred? The answer is yes.    The Dharma, when known for oneself, helps in the following ways (this is not a complete list, but it is a great place to start):     1. **Suffering**: we can learn the difference between the suffering that is put upon us and the suffering we cause ourselves. Once this distinction is made, then we can learn how to stop unnecessary suffering. 2. **Impermanence:** through understanding, we realize that all things are impermanent. We can skillfully apply this concept to our emotional pain. 3. **Holding ourselves most dear:** The Buddha frequently taught that we must be compassionate to ourselves. Many times, our preconceived notions on how we must stoically endure trauma gets in the way of this. We harshly criticize ourselves and set unrealistic expectations. Through the Dharma, we learn to love ourselves, and with that love, we hold our pain in a container of compassion. This compassion leads to healing. 4. **Coming Back to the Present Moment:** Often, when we suffer trauma, we live in the past (the moment of trauma), or we live in the future (how this trauma will impact our future selves). Dealing with present moment trauma, past-moment trauma, and future impact trauma is overwhelming. Through the Dharma, we learn to tease these apart and tackle what is currently in front of us. 5. **Vastness of Awareness:** Many times, trauma will become all we can see. It feels like we live in it. The Dharma opens our awareness, and by doing so, dilutes the suffering. 6. **Real, but not True:** The Dharma allows us to see that some of the feelings around trauma are extremely real to us, but that does not necessarily make them true. We learn to discern what mental constructs are. 7. **Appreciation:** often, our pain is so acute that we fail to realize the baby steps we are making. The Dharma teaches us to be aware and celebrate each moment of victory.     Trauma and suffering are part of the human experience. There is no escaping it. Like death, it eventually comes for everyone. Although a licensed therapist is your first and best means of coping, the Dharma offers us a wise and skillful way to engage with our mental anguish as we are going through therapy. But it takes a deep understanding to utilize this skill. And the best way to obtain that understanding is through training. That is why we call it a Buddhist Practice. | | |

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