

## Finding Steady Ground in the Post Election Distress

by Lunden Abelson MA, BC-DMT, LPC

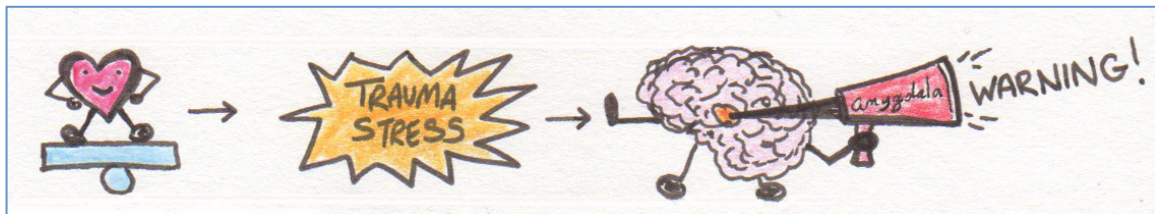
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The week after the 2016 Presidential election almost every one of my clients was in shock. At my office in Philadelphia the following weekend I held a support group for people to come together. People who had never met before expressed their shock, grief, outrage, fear, and searched for some hope.

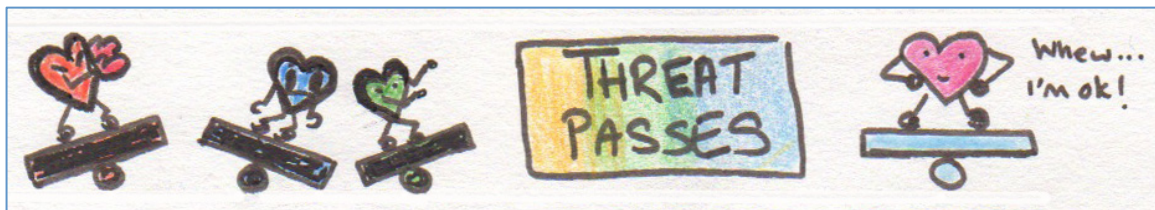
As the weeks progressed towards the inauguration, conversations in my office were not unique. Clients were irritable and anxious. They felt tired, angry, and impatient. Many were at odds with loved ones and all felt powerless. They had a sense that their distress was connected to the political climate but they were at a loss about how to cope.

Everyone I worked with, whether they identified as political or not, suddenly reported feeling adrift and questioned what they should do now. People seemed to be over stimulated, fearful and reactive.

**As a therapist used to working with trauma, I recognized these reactions as stress responses to fear and threat.** When our bodies are under chronic stress or facing a traumatic situation, the brain responds brilliantly. Areas of the brain hard wired for protection and survival — the limbic system and the amygdala — kick into gear.



This is an excellent system to have when we need to make a snap decision. Typically when the fight-flight or freeze and collapse defenses come on line they respond to the threat and then when the threat passes balance returns to the nervous system.



However under constant stress our systems run the risk of not returning to a calm state. It's as if an internal stress thermostat is broken — keeping us in a heightened state. This causes us to feel tired, angry, irritable, sleepy, depressed, anxious, hopeless and sick.

**When our stress thermostat runs haywire we can lose track of our power and create a grim narrative of the world.** Our sense of personal and collective agency can diminish and we can begin to experience the world as something that happens to us forgetting that we are capable of creating, being intentional, taking breaks and choosing to care for ourselves and our communities.



To stay active and effective in our lives we have a responsibility to tend to our wellbeing. We must see our reactive state and then act to make healthy choices, reminding ourselves we have agency and influence.

**Conversations with my clients and with strategist and activist Daniel Hunter led to us creating Finding Steady Ground ([findingsteadyground.com](http://findingsteadyground.com)), a tool with 7 practical behaviors to be used to strengthen spirits to resist and thrive in these times.**

Each of these behaviors helps reset our internal thermostat and heightens our sense of agency:

1. Make conscious decisions about where and when to get your news – and what you do afterwards.
2. Get together with some people face-to-face to support each other and make sure you stay in motion.
3. Be mindful – pray, meditate, or reflect on those you know who are being impacted by oppressive policies, and extend that love to all who may be suffering.
4. Read, listen to, or share a story about how others have resisted injustice.
5. Be aware of yourself as one who creates.
6. Take a conscious break from social media.
7. Commit to sharing with others what's helping you.

**Learn more about these 7 behaviors at: [FindingSteadyGround.com](http://FindingSteadyGround.com)**

I firmly believe that healing happens with increased awareness and the calming of our nervous system. From their people can process how and why we are feeling what we are feeling. With these insights people can mobilize and create change in their lives.

That change breeds' power and agency. I believe personal empowerment and collective wellbeing contributes to healthy dialogue and community commitment that can contribute to social action and social healing.

**I have witnessed individuals as they steady themselves, identify their fears and claim their power. I have witnessed the growing strength in these individuals as they meet themselves with compassion and ready themselves to translate that steadfast commitment into their communities.**



#### References

Siegel D, (2011) *Mindsight*. New York. Random House  
 Van Der Kolk B, (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score*. New York, NY. Penguin Books