

FIRST AID FOR THE SOUL AFTER HEARTBREAK

*Connecting body and soul after
betrayal trauma, deception and loss of love*



BY SANDRA LEE DENNIS

To get through a betrayal crisis, it is important, first of all, that you keep up your basic self-care. Remember that your body, emotions, mind and spirit are all under stress from the shock. When you are hurting, you may not feel like doing these things, but they are the cornerstones for your recovery:

- Eat well and moderately,
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- Get plenty of sleep (get help if you cannot sleep)
- Keep a journal
- Reach out to family and friends

As important as taking care of the basics is, you may eventually find yourself longing for something more to help you cope. I believe you will find that betrayal is a spiritual crisis that is pushing you toward spiritual healing. When you are feeling overwhelmed by the shock, however, and perhaps for a long time afterwards, the spiritual resources you previously relied on may seem to have evaporated. This is normal and to be expected.

When we are being broken down and taken deeper into ourselves, our former foundations crumble. The dismantling of our relation to ourselves, to the world around us, and to God and spiritual realms, are necessary first steps. The destruction is as sacred as the new beginning that will be coming. It paves the way for a fresh, more authentic relationship with life to blossom from the ruins of the past.

Whether we are aware of it or not, our connection to the invisible world brings invaluable support for the shattered soul. The gifts of the spirit world are essential, not only to recover, but to help transform our suffering into wisdom, strength, heart and compassion. Here are fifteen suggestions for keeping a conscious lifeline to your soul during this challenging time. Wherever you are in your healing, choose those that appeal most to you now.



Photo courtesy Bashar Al-Ba'noon

I. TELL YOUR STORY.

Your first order of business after a life-exploding betrayal is to directly address the trauma. One of the most proven ways to do this is to tell or write out your story. Through flashbacks and intrusions, your mind is already asking you to come to terms with what happened. Each time you purposely revisit the “scene of the crime” with awareness and support it helps reduce the charge that keeps pulling you into the painful past as if it were happening now.

You may find yourself needing to describe the traumatic event over and over again, and find it difficult to think or talk about anything else. Or, you may simply go on lockdown, as if nothing unusual has happened at all and push the feelings away. Either way, telling the story in a safe environment can help to unfreeze your traumatized brain.

2. ASK FOR HELP.

But choose carefully who you trust with your vulnerability. Sharing your story and your pain with anyone who, however subtly, judges or blames you, gives you advice on getting over it, or is anxious to change the subject will only drive you further into your shell. Choose the best listener you know—preferably: 1) someone you trust cares about you; and 2) someone who has been through a similar experience. Many people may believe they know what you are going through, but do not; probe to learn more. Restrain your impulse to talk to anyone who will listen.

Recovering from shattered trust can be a long process. It is a lot to ask of a friend to hang in with you when you need to talk about what happened for the hundredth time. If possible, find a trained trauma specialist. Seek out someone with whom you feel safe, and ideally, who has lived through a similar experience. I found Somatic Experiencing very helpful. Many recommend EMDR. See my website for further resources:

<http://www.sandraledennis.com/shattered-soul/>



Photo courtesy Pedro Ribeiro Simões

3. GROUND YOURSELF IN THE HERE AND NOW.

To give yourself a break from the story playing over in your head, you want to come into the current moment as much as possible. If you have a meditation practice, you know what to do. If you do not, now is an excellent time to start. Go to Tara Brach's [website](#), listen to her guided meditations. Practice dropping intrusive thoughts, images, memories, and imaginary conversations. Shift your awareness to your five senses. Keep returning to the sounds, sights, and sensations around you. Do not worry if you consistently “fail,” little slivers of current time will still slip through the trauma trance.

4. TAKE TIME OUT EACH DAY TO BE WITH YOUR FEELINGS.

Make this a priority, as important as eating and sleeping; otherwise, the feelings may go underground and cause even more trouble. Treat yourself *as if you are attending to a hurting child because you are*. Tending to feelings is not the same as being overwhelmed by them. If you can, follow your breath moving in and out to settle yourself. When the pain comes on, try for two minutes to allow the hurt in, a little at a time, on the in-breath. On the out-breath, send into the pain any hint of a pleasurable sensation you can locate—tenderness, warmth, or aliveness. Always be gentle, touch into the pain briefly, then regroup by shifting your attention to something soothing, then touch again into the pain.



5. BE CURIOUS AND WELCOME YOUR FEELINGS.

Try your best not to judge or resist the pain, obsessing, anger, despair or hypervigilance. Try this: Do not label your feelings at all, just stay with them when they arise, be curious and “listen.” Ask, “What are you trying to tell me?”

Listen for the messages in the feelings as if you are learning a new language. Higher, spiritual forces surround us and reach us most readily when we are cracked open. Listen for their guidance coming from the pain itself—not necessarily in words, but in images, “the sounds of silence,” insights. Befriend your feelings this way and your heart may sense that you are not alone.



6. TRY SINGING.

If you simply cannot concentrate while attending to your feelings, which often happens with trauma, sing, hum, chant, or repeat to yourself a tune, prayer or mantra that inspires and soothes you. Try rocking yourself gently or climbing in a warm bathtub for additional calming. If the pain gets too intense, back off. Find a benign distraction. Look at a magazine, turn on a video, take a walk, play with your cat, call a friend. Always overcorrect in the direction of being patient and gentle with your self.

7. REACH OUT FOR HEALING TOUCH & LET YOURSELF BE HELD.

Touch helps, perhaps more than anything, to heal betrayal and abandonment wounds lodged deep in the body. It is important to let yourself receive reassuring warmth, hugs and hand-holding from anyone you do still trust. Regular healing touch with a well-screened, recommended massage or body therapist can also be invaluable in helping to release the pain.



8. CHOOSE A “NAME OF GOD”

that reminds you of your spiritual aspirations or highest good. This can be a word or a short phrase, or better yet, an image or memory that symbolizes the best life could bring. Use this image like a salve for your hurt and anger. Each time you notice a painful memory or obsessive thought, PAIR it with your word/phrase or image. Gradually the two will blend and your sense of the meaning and mystery of what has happened to you will deepen. Your narrative or story will subtly begin to change to include this quality.



Photo courtesy Riccardo Cuppini

9. LISTEN TO AND READ SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS.

I found it helpful to listen to meditation teacher [Pema Chodron's](#) CD's. Keep inspiring books at hand. You might want to read Pema's book, *When Things Fall Apart*. She specializes in teaching mindfulness in the midst of suffering. She lived through betrayal, and the kind wisdom in her voice soothes and takes you deeper into the self-love you need now.



10. EXERCISE YOUR BODY IN NATURE.

Spend as much time outdoors as possible, but at least twenty minutes, every day to focus on the wonders of the natural world. Walk around the block, sit in your garden, go to the park. Take in the trees, the flowers, the breeze, the sun, and the sky. Whenever possible make a trip to the ocean, a stream or a lake, the mountains, or a forest. Stop and give your attention to whatever attracts you for at least ten breaths (count! or you may slip back into trauma preoccupations). Feel into the grand forces of nature and let their warmth, inspiration, and support in.



11. BRING YOUR FEELINGS INTO FORM.

Express your creativity: dance, paint, color, draw, sculpt, make a collage, write, take photographs, create a website, cook. You are bubbling with creative energy unleashed by shock, now is the time to use it.

12. REASSURE YOUR HEART AROUND OTHERS.

After the shock of broken trust, everyone becomes an introvert for a while. If you are already introverted, you may need help to come out of your cave after being badly hurt. Do your best to stay connected with at least one person. It is also good just to be around other beating hearts for some part of each day. Join a group or class that does not demand your personal participation. If you are lonely and start to despair, go to the store, say hello to the clerk. You will feel better. Go anywhere where there is another human being. We are social animals. It is soothing just to show up around others. Our body registers: we are part of the human race. Oh, right!



Photo courtesy [Christian Ostrosky](#)

13. TRY “GRACE” WITH A NEW TWIST.

Another way to bring your self out of isolation into more connection with the rest of humanity is to pause for a minute before meals. Picture the hundreds (likely thousands) of people whose labor and care went into bringing the food you are about to eat to you. In this way, eating itself becomes a powerful reminder of how we depend on and are connected with so many other people.

14. MAKE A MENTAL NOTE OF ANYTHING GOOD, BEAUTIFUL, KIND OR INSPIRING,

no matter how small, throughout the day: a sip of warm tea, a helpful idea, a smile from a stranger, the blue of the sky, your feet on the ground. At the end of the day, go back and force yourself to recall these moments. When we have lost our love through deception, infidelity, or rejection, it can feel as if all good has gone out of life. Little by little, start rebuilding the reservoir of goodness in your soul by milking each tiny pleasure, kindness, or beauty for all it is worth.



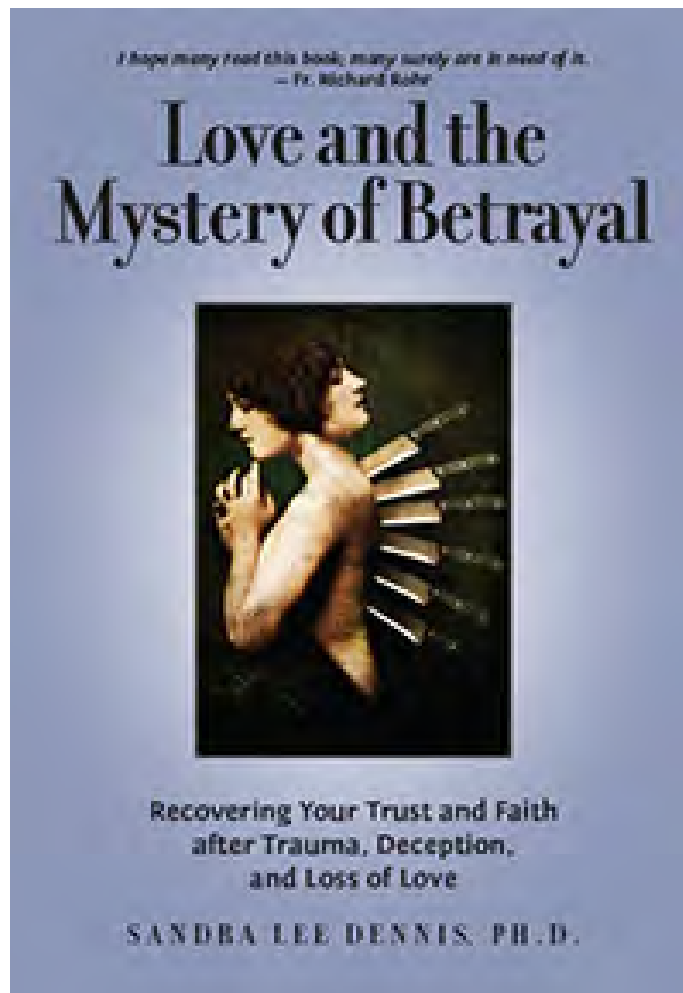
15. CALL ON GOD, A HIGHER POWER,

as often as you can remember—even if feel alone in the universe, and the practice feels empty and meaningless to you now. Ask for help. Put your rational mind on hold and tell yourself this practice is to help revive your heart. Just do it. **Take at least five minutes** morning and evening and whenever you can stop during the day to stop and take five deep breaths. On each breath, ask for help, whisper the name of God that is most real for you. Help is already with you and soon enough, you will know the truth of being loved and supported by a love that will not fail you.



If you find this eBooklet helpful, you may want to read my book *Love and the Mystery of Betrayal: Recovering Your Trust and Faith after Trauma, Deception and Loss of Love*. Find it on amazon.com:

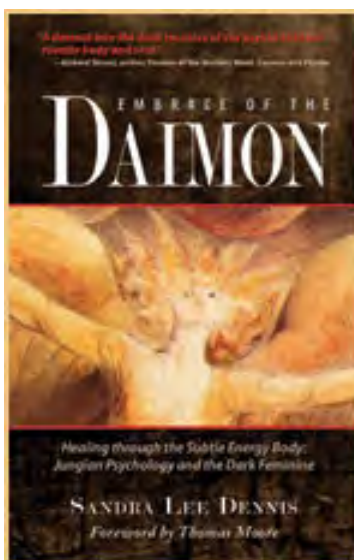
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Embrace of the Daimon:
*Healing through the Subtle Energy Body/
Jungian Psychology & the Dark Feminine*
Foreword by Thomas Moore



[Check out *Embrace of the Daimon* on Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1493000000)

This book is for people who are intrigued by or struggling with “the shadow”; the imaginal realm; the dark feminine: the interplay of sexuality, sensuality, violence, death and transformation; the subtle body; or the role of the mind/body connection in Jungian psychology/individuation. Dark subject matter not always easily to digest—Not for the faint of heart!

“Sandra Dennis has written a courageous, important book...she moves psychology into a fuller engagement with the uncharted depths of archetypal, imaginal reality embedded in bodily experience...a pioneering work that forges a bridge between the worlds of the scholar and the visionary...a significant contribution to the phenomenology of altered states of consciousness.”
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FINALIST Foreword Reviews Book of the Year 2012 Awards (Body/Mind/Spirit)

