In his previous book, *The Inner World of Trauma*, Donald Kalsched brought to light and defined the archetypal defenses of the personal spirit and self-care system that became a hallmark of early childhood trauma in the field of analytical psychology since its publication in 1996. He revealed how these archetypal defenses that are initially meant to protect the soul turn persecutory and negative to the developing psyche unless therapeutic help intervenes. In the *Inner World of Trauma*, Kalsched claimed these archetypal defenses to be uneducable, but in his second work, *Trauma and the Soul*, he presents a new possibility— that the self-care system can actually transform, particularly through the relational field of analysis and psychotherapy.

The major focus of *Trauma and the Soul* (2013) is on how the resistances of the archetypal dark forces are overcome and how the patient/therapist redeems her or his inner persecutors and
collaborates in the rescue of the soul, with attention drawn more to the salient moments in the work that creates healing and transformation, most of which are spiritual in nature. The particular trauma that Kalsched presents here is a relational trauma that happens in the earliest of attachments with the mother—a trauma that causes dissociation from the normal process of coming-into-being. With this early trauma, Kalsched has observed that many survivors develop “a deep understanding of a sacred world that sustains them,” and this mytho-poetic matrix is where the soul finds its growth and development—the place where all meaningful stories grow.

Kalsched begins the book with a tentative hypothesis: “that the purpose of the self-care system is to keep an innocent core of the self out of further suffering in reality, by keeping it ‘safe’ in another world” (p.24). On the surface, this may sound good; however this safe-keeping compromises personal development that can eventually lead to serious pathological problems in later life. On a stronger note, trauma survivors tend to have a greater access to the mytho-poetic quality of altered states that often are revealed in their dreams and creative expressions, giving them access to this innocent core that has been dissociated from conscious awareness. A series of personal stories of encounters with powers that reside in the collective unconscious are described that demonstrate “the relationship between the 'broken places’ and the 'light’” (p.28).

Into the book, Kalsched explores the following in detail, using case vignettes from his analytic practice, supportive evidence by pioneers of depth psychology, including Jung, and ancient mythical stories:

1) The image of the child as it appears in dreams during the therapy process, a child that is both innocent and sacred and a symbol of what is yet to come;

2) The dark side of the persecutory powers brought on by the defensive system, with special reference to Dante’s Inferno and the dynamics of the imprisoning powers of the fallen angel, Lucifer. Referred to as “Dis,” he is a three-headed monster that causes dismemberment and dissociation to the psyche and keeps the soul from becoming embodied;

3) Our wholeness, the most central of Jung’s understanding of the human struggle and his personal search for wholeness following his break from Freud. Kalsched does this with great
clarity, taking it to the soul level that has not before been addressed. He uses material from Jung’s writings in *The Red Book* and intimate correspondence with Freud;

4) Research in contemporary neuroscience, particularly by Iain McGilchrist, that suggests psychological healing involves both hemispheres of the brain working together in an integrated fashion. It also reveals that “early attachment experiences between infant and caregiver shape the actual development of the brain” (p.177), and particularly the right hemisphere that influences emotional development;

5) The acknowledgement by James Grotstein, Carl Jung, and others, of the sacred, mytho-poetic middle-space from which come dreams, metaphor, poetry, and spontaneous creative expressions;

6) Innocence, its loss and recovery that is “the crucial element in a person’s spiritual nature,” (p.214) presented from St. Exupery’s *The Little Prince*– a metaphorical story about the split-internal condition and structure that follows trauma and its ramification with the original innocent self.

7) The process of transformation of childhood trauma that results in an incarnation of its spiritual energies. Kalsched explores this through a provocative analysis of the life of C.G. Jung and his theory of the “divided self” that comprises the religious function of the psyche. His description of Jung’s creative process and analysis of its resulting outcome is deeply touching material that feeds the soul. From here he addresses Winnicott’s controversial diagnosis of Jung having childhood schizophrenia that Kalsched claims misses the point of Jung’s theory on the religious function of the psyche;

8) How early emotional trauma can prevent the stirrings of new life through the process of dissociation. This is tenderly presented through Kalsched’s analytic work with a patient against the backdrop of Grimm’s tale, *The Woman Without Hands*. His description of her childhood play with miniature Ginny Dolls touches upon H.G. Wells’ *Floor Games*, and her deep connection to nature as “Mother,” that “were like balm to the soul,” she said (p.306).
Kalsched makes it clear in his book that healing involves work on many levels of the psyche, not only the personal, that must include attention to the soul through its mytho-poetic language in dreams and creative expressions, and in the body where traumatic memories are stored or encoded as psychosomatic symptoms. Primarily, attention needs to be on bringing the soul back into one’s life—“that vital formative principle of the personality” (p.315) that is explored in all chapters of *Trauma and the Soul*.

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**TRAUMA AND THE SOUL: A PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND ITS INTERRUPTION**

By Donald Kalsched

*A reflection by Geri Grubbs*

Woodinville, Washington, USA

**KEY WORDS:** early, childhood bonding, trauma, soul, archetypal defenses, psycho-spiritual, persecutory, sacred, mytho-poetic matrix, dissociation, psychosomatic symptoms, self-care system, patient/therapist relationship, relational trauma, brain hemispheres, neuroscience, dreams, divided self, Ginny dolls, *The Little Prince, The Woman Without Hands*, *Dante’s Inferno*.

**ABSTRACT:** The author reflects on Donald Kalsched’s *Trauma and the Soul: A Psycho-Spiritual Approach to Human Development and its Interruption* (Routledge, 2013).