

Chapter 35e, Mountaintop Experiences

Many have observed that mountain-top “peak” experiences produce dramatic *temporary* benefits, but usually much smaller *lasting* changes. For example, over many years of experience, Dr. Wilder and other therapists at Shepherd’s House have noted that isolated mountain-top, “breakthrough” healing experiences do not usually produce much in the way of lasting transformation.¹ My observation is that we can have mountain-top experiences with respect to both Immanuel Approach healing and maturity-skill work. And I also observe that these mountain-top experiences can produce dramatic temporary benefits with respect to our connection with Jesus, our overall joyfulness and sense of well being, our relational circuit activity, our maturity skills, our capacity, and our resistance to triggering. However, even though the more dramatic initial glow from mountain-top experiences eventually fades, the smaller, permanent benefits that remain *are still significant, and can accumulate over time.*²

I would like to present a few thoughts that will hopefully help us to appreciate mountain-top experiences for the special blessings that they are, and also help us to embrace a transformation *lifestyle* that will produce a steadily increasing treasure of benefits that remain even after we come down from the mountain—*permanent* benefits that will accumulate over time to produce increasingly widespread transformation.

1. Chris M. Coursey, *Transforming Fellowship: 19 Brain Skills that Build Joyful Community* (East Peoria, IL: Shepherd’s House Inc) 2016, page 9.

2. Important caveat regarding the “smaller” lasting benefits from individual “breakthrough” sessions: A specific trauma package will occasionally anchor an especially strategic issue with longstanding, widespread negative effects. In these situations, a single breakthrough healing session can result in more dramatic lasting benefits by resolving the strategic issue. For example, if you had a small cluster of traumatic memories that were fueling major depression or a persistent addiction, and these memories were resolved in a breakthrough session so that your longstanding depression or addiction resolved, the permanent resolution of your depression or addiction would produce widespread benefits that would last the rest of your life. However, even with these occasional strategic breakthrough sessions, there will still be a component of the mountain-top effect. For example, even though many permanent benefits associated with resolving depression or an addiction will remain, the especially dramatic increase in connection to Jesus immediately following the breakthrough, the exceptional gratitude immediately following the breakthrough, and the especially dramatic increase in relational circuit activity immediately follow the breakthrough will all eventually fade to some extent. Furthermore, resolution of your depression or addiction will not produce transformation with respect to other issues that are anchored in other trauma that have not yet been resolved.

I. Immanuel Approach Emotional Healing

Immanuel Approach emotional healing often includes an especially intense, clear encounter with Jesus in the context of the healing work, and also dramatic, sudden release from some particular longstanding pain and/or issue at the moment of healing. This results in unusual, exceptional gratitude, unusually strong relational circuit activity, an unusually strong connection with Jesus, a dramatic increase in overall joyfulness and sense of well being, a dramatic increase in maturity-skill strength, a dramatic increase in capacity, and a dramatic protection from triggering. These dramatic benefits are most intense at the moment of the healing breakthrough, but they also linger in an attenuated state during a period of mountain-top afterglow, which can last for hours, days, weeks, or even months (depending on the intensity of the mountain-top experience on the one side, and the stress level and triggering intensity of the recipient's "normal" life on the other side).

A. Unusually Strong Connection with Jesus: Several of my strongest, clearest experiences of Jesus' presence have occurred in the context of Immanuel Approach emotional healing breakthroughs, and my connection with Jesus continued to be stronger than usual for two to three weeks of afterglow on each of these occasions. Almost all of my emotional healing experiences include at least some degree of increased perception of Jesus and connection with Jesus. I have observed these same patterns with most of the recipients I work with, and many others in the Immanuel Approach community have also reported this phenomenon.

To some extent, this is simply an empirical data point from widespread observations. However, it also makes sense. For example, it makes sense that describing everything to the facilitator would help the recipient to perceive Jesus more clearly and to feel the connection more intensely (see chapters sixteen and seventeen), it makes sense that the faith and prayer of the facilitator would increase the quality of the connection (see chapter twenty-three), and it makes sense that deliberately seeking and removing blockages would increase the strength and clarity of the connection (see chapters twelve and thirteen). Another piece that makes sense is that both the increased gratitude and the increased relational circuit activity that linger during the afterglow would make it easier to continue perceiving and connecting with the Lord with increased clarity and strength (see chapter six). Furthermore, if any component of the trauma that gets resolved in the breakthrough session has been contributing to specific, memory-anchored hindrances, then part of the fruit from the breakthrough healing will be permanent benefits with respect to perceiving and connecting with Jesus (see chapter forty-two).³

3. Note that many of the different components of an emotional healing mountain-top experience reinforce each other. For example, increased gratitude reinforces increased relational circuit activity and increased trigger protection. And increased relational circuit activity reinforces increased gratitude, increased connection with Jesus, increased joyfulness, increased capacity, and increased trigger protection. And increased connection with Jesus

B. Exceptional Gratitude and Relational Circuit Activity: Mountain-top emotional healing breakthroughs are *always* associated with exceptional gratitude and unusually intense relational circuit activity, and increased gratitude and relational circuit activity always linger as part of the afterglow. An especially intense, clear encounter with the living presence of Jesus is one of the most profound, precious, beautiful relational experiences in the universe, and it makes sense that this would produce a dramatic increase in both relational circuit activity and gratitude. It also makes sense that sudden, dramatic relief from a longstanding painful issue would produce exceptional gratitude. Furthermore, during the afterglow: lingering increased connection to Jesus will *continue* to stimulate relational circuit activity and gratitude; lasting relief from longstanding pain will continue to stimulate exceptional gratitude; exceptional gratitude will help unusually intense relational circuit activity to persist; and unusually intense relational circuit activity will help exceptional gratitude to persist.

C. Dramatically Increased Joyfulness and Sense of Well-being (Mild to Moderate Euphoria): Another thing we will notice during mountain-top peak experiences (and also during the lingering afterglow) is a dramatic increase in our overall joyfulness and sense of well-being. Unusually strong relational-circuit activity will result in feeling both more connected to those around us and more intensely glad to be with them. This, in turn, usually increases the relational-circuit activity in those we are with, and to the extent that positive-feedback loops occur, our exceptional relational-circuit activity will produce a season during which our relational connection joy will be dramatically increased. These are the circuits that do the especially intense “I’m in love” euphoria we experience when infatuated with a romantic partner (which is the scenario in which these circuits are most intensely fired up). However, when this relational-connection-joy positive feedback loop is even moderately fired up, it can produce the increased joyfulness and sense of well-being we see with mountain-top healing breakthroughs. Furthermore, I believe that especially clear, intense encounters with the living presence of Jesus and unusually intense gratitude also stimulate the dopamine euphoria circuits directly.⁴

The short summary is that a mountain-top healing breakthrough will predictably, understandably cause you to feel *really* good for a while.

reinforces increased gratitude, increased relational circuit activity, increased capacity, and increased trigger protection. And increased trigger protection reinforces . . . etc. You get the picture.

4. The subjective experience of euphoria is not *exactly* the same thing as the combination of relational connection joy and an overall sense of well-being, but there is a *lot* of overlap.

D. Dramatically Increased Maturity-skill Strength: As we develop, there are psychological/spiritual *skills* that we must master in order to thrive. For example, we must learn to handle painful emotions—to stay emotionally connected, to maintain (or regain) access to our relational circuits, and to think and behave appropriately while feeling painful emotions. Another example is that we must learn to be aware of and care for our own needs. Yet another example is that we must learn to be aware of and care for the needs of others. These are psychological/spiritual skills that we learn as we grow in psychological/spiritual maturity, and mastering these maturity skills is an important part of being able to navigate through the challenges of life in a way that feels like thriving (as opposed to just coping).⁵

This is all relevant to our discussion in this chapter because mountain-top, breakthrough emotional healing experiences produce a season of dramatically increased maturity skill strength. First, a dramatic increase in the intensity of our relational circuit activity will increase the strength of many of our maturity skills, since our relational circuits are right in the middle of so many of the maturity skills.

Second, the increase in *average* maturity-skill strength will be especially pronounced because the unusually strong connection to Jesus, the exceptional gratitude, the dramatically increased relational circuit activity, the dramatically increased joyfulness, and the dramatically increased sense of well-being that we experience during the mountain-top afterglow will all protect against triggering. When we are triggered, to the extent that we are blended with a traumatized child memory package, we will be operating with the maturity skills that we had in the traumatic childhood experience.⁶ Furthermore, “normal” life for most of us includes a sobering amount of being triggered to subtle (or not so subtle) childhood traumatic memories,⁷ so our *average* maturity skill levels will usually be somewhere between the skill levels from our un-triggered adult selves and the skill levels from our traumatized-child memory packages.⁸

5. If you are not already familiar with the concept that psychological/spiritual *skills* are an important part of maturity, and that these psychological/spiritual maturity skills contribute to thriving in the face of challenges, see the glossary for additional introduction, and see “Brain Science, Psychological Trauma, and the God Who Is with Us—Part II” for a much longer discussion.

6. Child skill levels to start with, and then further impaired by trauma and loss of relational circuits.

7. If you are not already convinced regarding this reality, see the first five chapters of *Outsmarting Yourself* for compelling brain science, case-study examples, and discussion.

8. For most of us, with quite a bit of subtle triggering, our *average* maturity skill levels are usually quite a bit below the skill levels from our un-triggered adult selves

However, during the season of mountain-top afterglow, when an unusually strong connection to Jesus, exceptional gratitude, dramatically increased relational circuit activity, . . . etc. protect us from triggering, we spend much less time blended with impaired, traumatized-child ego states. Therefore, the improvement with respect to our average maturity skill levels will be particularly pronounced, since the reduced amount of triggering means that the average will be only slightly below the elevated maturity skill levels of the un-triggered mountain-top afterglow.

Finally, the increase in our maturity-skill strength will appear to be even greater than it actually is because the mountain-top positive momentum package can cover, or hide, certain maturity skill weaknesses. For example, if you lack the maturity skill of staying relational while angry, this deficit will be covered, or hidden, by the combination of mountain-top euphoria, increased relational circuit activity, and trigger protection because these three factors will cause you to be much less likely to get angry.

E. Dramatically Increased Capacity: Mountain-top, breakthrough healing experiences produce a season of dramatically increased capacity. To begin with, just having your relational circuits unusually fired up will increase your capacity. An increased connection with Jesus will also increase your capacity—to the extent you are connected to Jesus, you can share his capacity. And this increased capacity will produce tangible, practical, widespread benefits. For example, if you have more capacity, you will be able to navigate more intensely stressful situations while still keeping your relational circuits on and retaining the use of your level 4 and level 5 higher functions—you will be able to navigate more intensely stressful situations while remaining relational, kind, joyful, creative, tolerant, flexible, etc.

F. Dramatic Protection from Triggering: As just mentioned above, an unusually strong connection to Jesus, exceptional gratitude, dramatically increased relational circuit activity, dramatically increased joyfulness, and dramatically increased sense of well-being will all protect against triggering. For as long as the mountain-top afterglow continues, we will have a “thicker skin,” or increased psychological buffer zone—it will be much more difficult for triggers to get through our gratitude, relational-mode tolerance, overall joyfulness, and sense of well-being in order to activate traumatic memories. As just mentioned above, this means that we will spend a lot less time with our relational circuits off and blended with toxic content from unresolved trauma.

G. Positive Brain-Mind-Spirit Momentum: The especially clear, intense encounter with the living presence of Jesus, the unusually intense gratitude, the unusually intense relational circuit activity, the dramatically increased joyfulness, and the dramatically increased sense of well-being that are part of mountain-top healing breakthroughs will all produce what could be

thought of as positive momentum in our neurological brains. That is, the intensely positive mountain-top experience will produce electrical, chemical, and structural changes in our brains, and these changes will continue for a while as positive neurological momentum. (This positive momentum will carry forward until it is depleted and degraded by the stressors, challenges, pain, and triggering of everyday life in this broken world.) Furthermore, I believe there are also parallel phenomena with positive momentum with respect to our non-physical minds and spirits.

H. Apparent/Temporary Widespread Transformation: When we put all of these pieces together, we see that mountain-top, “breakthrough” emotional healing experiences can often produce the appearance of widespread transformation.

However, much of this positive change will be *temporary*. As we encounter the relentless stresses and triggers of this broken world, we will gradually lose our mountain-top positive momentum. And as we lose our brain-mind-spirit positive momentum, our euphoria and apparent widespread transformation will also fade. A single healing breakthrough that eliminates one specific package of traumatic memories will produce a brief mountain-top peak experience, a season of afterglow with *apparent/temporary* widespread transformation, and then one specific, focused area of *permanent* change that we will be able to verify if we deliberately look right at the issue(s) that was resolved.⁹ But a single healing breakthrough will *not* resolve all of our other issues that are still hindering permanent widespread transformation—all of our other issues that are still being fueled by the traumas that were *not* resolved in this particular breakthrough session.

I. A Lifestyle of Ongoing Immanuel Approach Healing: In contrast, a lifestyle of ongoing Immanuel Approach healing will produce steadily increasing permanent transformation. As you steadily, progressively resolve more and more of the traumatic memories that affect you:

- You will spend less and less of your time with your relational circuits off, blended with child trauma memories that include low capacity and poor maturity skills;
- You will spend more and more of your time with your relational circuits on, in an un-triggered adult ego state with access to your adult capacity and maturity skills;
- You will carry fewer and fewer of the specific triggered reactions that impair your discernment, that disrupt specific maturity skills, and that cause specific dysfunctional relationship patterns; and

9. Actually, each resolution of a specific package of traumatic memories will produce lasting benefits with respect to our connection to Jesus, gratitude, relational circuit activity, joyfulness, overall sense of well-being, maturity-skill strength, capacity, and resistance to triggering, but these permanent positive changes will just be much smaller than the initial dramatic benefits experienced during the mountain-top peak and season of afterglow.

- You will carry fewer and fewer specific, memory-anchored issues and distortions that hinder your connection with Jesus.¹⁰

II. THRIVE Maturity-Skill Seminars

For readers who are familiar with THRIVE, I would like to offer a few thoughts about their maturity-skill seminars.¹¹ My observation is that their maturity-skill seminars can sometimes produce a similar mountain-top phenomena. During the week of the conference, participants are sheltered from many of their usual stresses and triggers, which results in their relational circuits being on line more of the time and being more intensely active when they are on line. Also, with any THRIVE conference, participants will constantly be participating in exercises that apply principles and tools to deliberately stir up gratitude and stimulate strong relational circuits activity, since being aware of one's relational circuits and keeping them strongly active is such a foundational piece for all of the maturity skill work that THRIVE does. Furthermore, THRIVE maturity skill seminars include Immanuel Approach exercises to help the participants connect with Jesus.

The predictable result of these pieces during the average THRIVE maturity-skill training event is that participants will sometimes have “mountain-top” experiences of unusual, exceptional gratitude, unusually strong relational circuit activity, a strong connection with Jesus, a dramatic increase in overall joyfulness, a dramatically increased sense of well being, a dramatic increase in maturity-skill strength, a dramatic increase in capacity, and a dramatic protection from triggering. (This was certainly what Charlotte and I experienced when we attended a THRIVE marriage retreat, and what we experienced when we recently attended a THRIVE level I training). And just as with healing-breakthrough mountain-top experiences, the combination of these dramatic positive changes will produce the *appearance* of widespread transformation.

Just as with healing-breakthrough mountain-top experiences, maturity-skill-seminar mountain-top experiences will build positive momentum in our neurological brains, in our non-physical minds, and in our spirits. And just as with healing breakthroughs, this positive momentum will carry forward until it is depleted and degraded by the stressors, challenges, pain, and triggering of

10. Remembering Jesus' comment from chapter twenty: "...the primary, most important purpose of all this emotional healing stuff is to remove the blockages that are between your heart and me." The *most important* accumulating, permanent benefit is therefore the growing benefit to our relationship with Jesus that comes from progressive resolution of memory-anchored distortions, hindrances, and blockages. See chapter forty-two for *many* examples and a thorough discussion of memory-anchored distortions and blockages that hinder our connection to Jesus.

11. For additional information regarding Life Model Works and their maturity-skill-training seminars, see www.thrivetoday.org.

everyday life in this broken world. And again, this mountain-top glow will last for hours, days, weeks, or even months (depending on the intensity of the mountain-top experience on the one side, and the stress level and triggering intensity of the person’s “normal” life on the other side).

III. Other Phenomena that Contribute to Mountain-top Peaks and then Fading Glow

Other phenomena also contribute to the subjective experience of mountain-top peaks and then fading glow. For example:

- We hyper-focus on the point of pain when an acute problem is present, and then we hyper-focus on our relief when the acute problem is resolved. For the brief duration of this hyper-focus, the initial pain and then subsequent relief take up the whole screen. Our relief is intense, and we experience intense gratitude along with it. But then, eventually, we realize that all of the rest of life is still there—the acute problem (and the subsequent relief and gratitude) are just one small piece in a much large picture.
- With any type of change, our neurological systems initially react intensely. However, if the new conditions remain they eventually become the new normal, and as our neurological systems adapt to the new conditions, our neurological reactions progressively decrease until the “new” conditions are hardly noticed. The implication with respect to mountain-top experiences is that we are initially much more aware of and grateful for any positive change, but then it eventually becomes the new normal and we just take it for granted.
- Because of the way in which our relational circuits interact with our emotional memories, we become temporarily unable to feel any of the positive benefits from a breakthrough healing when we are intensely triggered to the point that we go into non-relational mode. So we can tumble into an especially painful disappointment crash if we get intensely triggered shortly after a mountain-top experience.¹²

Unfortunately, we do not have space for additional discussion of these other phenomena in this already-very-large book. The objective for this chapter is that the reader recognize the overall phenomena of mountain-top peaks and then fading glow in association with both Immanuel Approach healing breakthroughs and maturity skill seminars.

IV. Avoid Mistaken Disenchantment

One of the most important reasons to know about this mountain-top phenomena is so that we can avoid mistaken disenchantment. As just discussed above, it is common for people to have a dramatically positive experience with an Immanuel healing breakthrough and/or a THRIVE maturity skill seminar; and for the duration of the mountain-top glow, they believe they have discovered the silver bullet for all problems on the planet. They are intensely excited about sharing

12. For additional explanation regarding the relationship between our relational circuits and our emotional memories, and how getting triggered into non-relational mode can block our ability to feel memories for positive experiences, see *Outsmarting Yourself* second edition, chapter twelve, pages 109 – 113.

it with everyone they know, and they have visions of rapid, easy world transformation. However, as stresses, challenges, pain, and triggering bring them back down to “normal life,” they often experience disappointment, disenchantment, and disillusionment. “Wow. What a disappointment. I thought I had really found the answer, but it looks like this is turning out to be just another big disappointment.” In the worst case scenarios, painful disillusionment causes these people to walk away from Immanuel Approach emotional healing and/or maturity skill work.

But this is a mistaken, unnecessary response. If these people check carefully, they can verify that there is actually lasting, permanent fruit—the specific healing targets addressed in the breakthrough session are still resolved, and/or the specific new maturity skills are still present. But the lasting, permanent benefits are just substantially smaller than the temporary benefits experienced during the mountain-top peak and afterglow.

There is an understandable painful disappointment when the stress, pain, and triggers of life bring one down from the mountain-top glow. But the needed response that I would like to invite and encourage is for us to get through this disappointment, and then embrace the accurate picture of reality and the need for a *lifestyle* of both ongoing healing and ongoing maturity skill work. I would like us to be able to accept and embrace mountain-top experiences for what they are—occasional special blessings—occasional times of exceptional joy and connection with Jesus. And I would also like us to avoid throwing the baby out with the bath water when we come down from the mountain top. I believe we can dodge disillusionment by deliberately confirming and remembering the (smaller) permanent benefits, and then embracing a lifestyle of ongoing healing and maturity skill work.

Furthermore, the disappointment will be much less painful if it is not a surprise. That is, our disappointment will be much less intense if we know about mountain-top phenomena, and are expecting to eventually come back down after a time of special blessing.

V. *Lifestyle* for Both Healing and Maturity-Skill Work

Again, one specific “breakthrough” healing will usually produce an initial mountain-top peak followed by a season of afterglow. But the usual course is for much of the initial dramatic benefits to fade as we encounter the stressors, challenges, pain, and triggers that seem to be so common in this broken world. If we check the specific traumatic memories, the specific issues, and the specific triggers that were addressed by the healing breakthrough, they will remain resolved. But much of the unusually strong connection to Jesus, the exceptional gratitude, the dramatically increased relational circuits activity, the dramatically increased joyfulness, the dramatically increased sense of well-being, the dramatically increased maturity-skill strength, the dramatically increased capacity, and the dramatic protection from triggering that all contribute to the perception of

widespread transformation will eventually fade.¹³ For widespread, deep, profound, lasting transformation, each of us needs to shovel away at our pile of memory-anchored issues through regular healing sessions over time.

Similarly, if we participate in a THRIVE maturity-skill seminar, we will often feel unusually warm and wonderful after an extended block of deliberately stirring up gratitude, deliberately keeping our relational circuits intensely active, and deliberately connecting with Jesus. However, once we get home and re-enter the usual challenges of our life, much of the dramatic initial benefits eventually fade. If we look carefully, we will notice small (but significant) lasting improvement in the specific skills we learned and practiced; but much of the exceptional gratitude, increased relational circuit activity, increased connection to Jesus, increased joyfulness, increased sense of well-being, increased maturity-skill strength, increased capacity, and increased resistance to triggering that all contribute to the perception of widespread transformation will eventually fade. For widespread, deep, profound, lasting transformation, we need to learn and practice maturity skills regularly over time.

In light of these observations, my summary assessment is that we need to embrace a *lifestyle* of ongoing work with respect to both healing and maturity skill development. The ideal is to combine these two as part of an optimal transformation lifestyle. Go back and forth between healing *and then* maturity skill building *and then back to* healing *and then back to* maturity skill building . . . etc.

VI. Avoid Unnecessary Conflict and Confusion

If one group is pursuing a *maturity skill lifestyle*, but only occasionally experiencing emotional healing breakthroughs when a crisis produces enough pain to motivate Immanuel sessions, they will conclude that maturity skill work is the *real* necessary foundation for true, deep, lasting, increasing, widespread positive change. And they will devalue the role of healing for trauma—they will perceive that a lifestyle of regular healing is an optional luxury for those who have the time and energy and money to work with an Immanuel Approach therapist, and that strategic healing work occasionally becomes a necessity in certain crisis situations.

On the other hand, if a different group is pursuing an *emotional healing lifestyle*, but only occasionally experiencing maturity skill mountain-tops at THRIVE training events, they will think that emotional healing work is the *real* necessary foundation for true, deep, lasting, increasing, widespread positive change. And they will devalue the role of maturity skill work—they will

13. Again, healing breakthroughs will always result in at least small permanent positive changes in each of these areas (see footnote #7); and occasionally, healing breakthroughs will result in larger lasting changes (see footnote #2).

perceive that a lifestyle of regular maturity skill work is an optional luxury for those that have the time and energy and money to participate in those long, expensive THRIVE training events, and that strategic maturity skill work occasionally becomes a necessity in certain crisis situations.

These two groups could easily argue about whether we should focus on maturity skill work or emotional healing work. What a sad, unnecessary, mistaken conflict caused by a false dichotomy. If we understand mountain-top experiences and the importance of lifestyle for *both* maturity skill work *and* emotional healing, we can avoid this unnecessary confusion and conflict. And we can synchronize our efforts as we embrace a transformation lifestyle that includes *both* ongoing maturity skill learning and practice *and also* ongoing work to resolve trauma.