

Turning Inward

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*“And even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I will not fear
For you are with me
Comforting me with your rod and your staff
As my Shepherd
Showing me each step”*

*Psalm 23 from: Norman Fischer, *Opening To You*, Zen Inspired Translations of the Psalms (2002)

The great contemplative traditions at the core of world religions have mapped the terrain of turning and looking inward for self-transcendence. Here is some musings based on numerous consultations I've done recently with cancer patients. Receiving a serious medical diagnosis creates what is called diagnosis shock and ongoing aggressive treatments recapitulate the shock. We are invited to come to terms with the possibility of the diagnosis being a terminal condition. And the fear of death can be quite strong.

The emotional turn inward from diagnosis shock brings us face to face with the mind of fear. Here we encounter obsessive thoughts about the future and past which must be minimized. Some thoughts about the future are necessary to make all the different appointments and decisions regarding the next step in the therapeutic roadmap and life in general.

We think about 84,000 thoughts a day and 66% of them are negative according to science. Many people are dominated by thoughts of the past which can generate depression and thoughts of the future can generate anxiety. However, the roots of depression and anxiety, anger and irritability are in fear. Fear must be met with contemplative practices to generate resilience and forbearance when overwhelmed. This includes states of fear involving terror. Such episodes of terror are extremely potent spiritually and offer a gateway to mystical experience. If one can stay connected to the terror and make space for it. All sorts of lights, intelligence and divine wisdom begin to manifest. All emotional states have a core of wisdom.

Most of the work is done by bringing one's attention back into the present moment of what's necessary now. What do I have to decide about tomorrow or yesterday's treatment right now? There is also a mind of non-thought that is always present. It is the space of open awareness and neutrality. The wisdom of knowing one's condition is neither good nor bad but always a manifestation of the divine. This is unconditional health. Our thought stream is just a tickertape running at the bottom of the screen of divine presence.

How do we connect to the sacred in the midst of overwhelm? There is also a turn inward to the sacred. Emotional states are always accompanied by changes in heartbeat. Conscious awareness of one's heartbeat is essential. It can tell us we need to change our behavior around fear and at the same time the heartbeat is the radiant love of God. The divine light of God, whose potential manifests internally in all sentient beings is known by the potency of the heartbeat. The light is located in the center of the human heart physically and spiritually. The capacity to experience the mind of fear, and have it dissipate into the divine light in the heart, is the sacred heart of Jesus and all other divine beings. This is the light of perfect health radiating from inside the heart. Just close your eyes and take a look, feel your heartbeat and imagine it being a bright light.

Having a daily spiritual reading, prayer, or contemplation, is necessary to allow more thoughts to be spent on that contemplation in the context of no past and no future in this very moment. Great insight can arise by staying in the present moment mentally and emotionally. Starting and finishing the day with a reading that can be contemplated frequently when thoughts of the past or future intrude, and they will, is an extremely valuable use of the mind and its capacity to remain in the present moment as a spiritual experience.

Turning Outward

Dissipation of all experience into the sacred heart of light is necessary, and there are numerous contemplative practices to explore these inward levels. And there must be a failsafe, because sometimes the turn inward can be too much to manage and dissipate into the divine light in the heart. When that “too much” is recognized, there needs to be an immediate turn outwards to the natural world. As soon as possible one must go into nature. Everything is God which includes both our internal experience and the entire universe as we perceive it with our senses. The natural world bathes us in her compassion constantly from the sunshine to the wind, from the birds to the bees. Be in nature without mentally labelling sights and sounds. Let the ordinary mind rest. Be in the radiant appearance of the divine light that is the natural world.

The other level of the turn outward is social contact with family, friends, therapeutic friends and spiritual advisers. It helps to have a big team assembled for the periodic moments of despair and overwhelm. It's a team effort especially when dealing with the complexities of an entire medical establishment

caught in a web of moral distress from their own overwhelm as human beings. It requires having a partner, a loved one present as much as possible to be able to reflect and help make clear decisions. There is no greater earthly love than to be held in the arms of a loved one.

Fear ignites the instinct for self-preservation. A deep sense of survival permeates our being at the cellular molecular level. It reminds me of the Bee Gees song "Staying Alive." Every cell knows the whole and wants to live. At the same time the instinct for self-transcendence is also activated. Every cell knows the unlimited possibility of transformation with every molecule attached to it inside and out. Every cell knows the absolute truth of impermanence and change. Survival and its transcendence is the basic polarity in our dance with life and death. Our work is to hold that polarity for self-healing to manifest at the physical and spiritual levels of the human body and our heart.

Will To Live

The instinct for self-preservation is directly associated with the will to live. Whereas the instinct for self-transcendence is directly associated with impermanence, acceptance of change and the forgiveness necessary to have a clear natural death of our moment-to-moment experience and end of life. Death takes place every moment of our lives because of the constancy of change mentally and emotionally that dominates our daily lives. In some people the will to live is not relinquished until a day before they die. With others it is possible to see the light of the divine long before the actual moment of death. This is the instinct for self-transcendence consciously manifesting and synchronized with the clear light radiating all creation in our spiritual heart wrapped around its four chambers. Why wait?

This instinctual dance is also fully manifested in the metabolism and molecular processes of the human body. This is why Eastern contemplative practices associated with visualization of color, deities, and sacred images have a direct effect on the metabolism of the body because it functions at the speed of light. This is enhanced by every cell because they all emit photons. Photon emission is strongest in the human heart. Our body is made of light. We hold the fear, and we hold the light, consciously. That is the work of life and death.

Self-healing is the recognition that both the fear and the light of wisdom arise simultaneously with each other. I cannot overstate the necessity of contemplative practice to facilitate and enhance these creative states. Buddhist meditation introduces one to their thought stream. Then it is up to you to stop being a guest and become the

director. As the director of your inner experience, self-healing is associated with self-compassion. It is essential that each of us have an unbiased sense of our emotional and behavioral ups and downs on a daily basis as well as their associated mass of thoughts constantly streaming live in one's mental continuum. We share this capacity with all humans.

A heightened ignition of self-preservation-self-transcendence can potentially propel us into this domain of nondualistic awareness. Here even the observer disappears leaving a direct sense of an infinite intelligence that is pure space, and pure wisdom. It is pure emptiness meaning substancelessness, being without substance except for the glow of its clear light. It can be a pin prick in the vast ocean of a dark void or a shimmering radiating glow permeating the heart, the body and skin. Close our eyes and roll them up to the middle of your forehead briefly to see this light being reflected in the third ventricle of our brain from the heart. Let it grow.

Diversions

Finally, some level of diversion is absolutely necessary with the turn outward. Allowing attention and concentration to shift towards a sport, television, exercise, and humor is critical. I am not advocating for getting addicted to any substance or media, but rather having a healthy diversion and knowing when it's over especially funny movies. Many people have healed themselves with terminal conditions into complete remission. Having an artistic hobby such as a friend of mine did brought her cancer into remission. Norman Cousins cured his cancer by watching nonstop Marx Brothers movies. Laughter is known to release anti-cancer chemicals into the blood. There are many other practices that are available to help a chronic illness go into remission or to come into direct access with the sacred regardless of biology. Accessing one's creativity is a doorway to a sacred remission chosen by a deeper intelligence located in the heart.

And while we are on the subject of dying, unfortunately many people have regrets that they have carried with them for many years. It is much easier to manage your regrets earlier in life especially if they are about not expressing your love enough. Now is the time to express our love. Now is the time to have all regrets go into remission. Everyone needs pastoral care available to them when facing life-threatening situations. All beliefs and views held by a caregiver who is a practicing Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu, etc. must be suspended into a neutrality with a connection to a clear wisdom when being with someone in a different faith-based tradition.

Everyone needs palliative care, and comfort care regardless of their medical condition. Our hands as manual therapists must be palliative, capable of being and expressing divine light for purification and simple loving kindness. Chronic illness gestated for a long time metabolically before manifesting into symptoms. All of us want to find meaning in our suffering. The search is on. The blame for a chronic illness such as cancer is spread between lifestyle and bad luck genetically. It makes no sense to blame one's condition on God which I have heard from many clients.

We live in the world of impermanence and a spiritual promise that there is a world of no beginning and no ending immediately available. It is in the present moment that we have the greatest potential to experience the divine light of wisdom both inside and outside. Allow yourself to be guided by a glowing radiating heartbeat all day and all night.