

Healing and Gratitude

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You Angel You

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This short essay is the first contribution to a new department in the Lens that examines the theme of the current issue from the perspective of healing. We might call this the Lens on Healing.

Healing can apply to individuals, organizations, and even whole societies. As soon as the scope is expanded to the group level, it becomes obvious that healing involves a change of ideas and practices. Organizations that keep doing the same thing based on the same old ideas and suppositions predictably keep getting the same outcomes. This is equally true at the individual level, but somehow people tend to take healing for granted, showing little or no concern for what created the disease. Actually, the miracle of healing occurs when true growth and positive life changes take place in response to a crisis. “Doctor, just give me a pill” most often fails as a long-term strategy for health.

Let’s focus the Lens on Healing on the topic of this issue: Gratitude. We all know the saying “Easy come, easy go.” When a gift is received without being truly valued, the care of the gift tends to be neglected. Money gifted to the unappreciative can come and go so quickly it can make a rushing sound! By contrast, deep gratitude is a good indication that a gift has been valued, possibly to be treasured for a long time to come. It’s similar with healing. A person may receive effective treatment for a certain condition or disease and maintain exactly the same thought patterns and behaviors that gave rise to the disease in the first place. In such cases, most people know intuitively that typically the ante is simply upped another notch. Nothing has been learned, and so the universe gives the person a stronger message—progressing from mild health problems to larger challenges. Along the way there are opportunities for the person to learn a lesson that can lead to new insights and behaviors. But these opportunities are often neglected in favor of a quick fix.

If something is out of balance in a person’s life—for instance, a bad habit like burning the candle at both ends in the pursuit of late-night activities—the first message might come as a cold, flu, or persistent fatigue. Going to bed to convalesce provides an opportunity for self-reflection and connecting the dots behind the sickness. A person may gripe about being sick and grudgingly make a sickbed vow to change the perceived cause, but more often than not the old behaviors will tend to reappear when the symptoms have abated. In the end, little may have been learned. So a thoughtful person might ask, What is the missing ingredient in this equation that would take the healing deeper and lead to lasting change?

Gratitude turns out to be key—not just in being thankful for the healing when it has occurred, but for the original challenge itself, which can help to unfold the meaning of it all. Being thankful is a choice that triggers a hidden power arising in the human heart that helps people maintain equilibrium throughout the vicissitudes of life. Stop here for a moment and consider the actual mechanism at hand. It's not to ignore or make little of the difficult facts of a given situation. Choosing to be grateful in *everything* is to acknowledge the unseen benevolent intelligence operating behind the scenes. We can swim against the current, or respond optimally to what is. You can't always control what takes place in life, but you can choose to be more conscious. It's taking the opportunity to stop and ask what wants to change so that healing can occur at the deepest level. Gratitude for the specific difficulty or limitation is the portal into the profound wisdom of the soul and can be the very pivot and point of healing—the meaning behind it all. This applies to the little challenges and also the big ones like a terminal diagnosis, bereavement, divorce, or loss of one's livelihood.

An example comes from the life of a client who had recovered from a near-death experience. Suffering cardiac arrest while at home, he had fallen on the dining room floor to the utter shock of his wife, who was with him at the time. He later told of floating out of his body and watching from the ceiling as paramedics ushered his wife out of the room and began administering CPR. No sooner did he take pity on his wife, thinking "Poor Beth," than the defibrillator started his heart again; he regained consciousness soon thereafter. Like so many others experiencing a near-death event, he took a good look at the sacrifices required to maintain his expensive lifestyle, with the big house and all the materialistic trimmings. Taking stock of what really mattered, he sold most of his possessions, moved into a modest home, and concentrated on deepening his relationship with his wife and children and grandchildren. He explained that he was extremely thankful to have had the opportunity to come back and make these course adjustments to his life, and not to have floated out of his body for good or died years later with an empty feeling to take with him as he passed over. This man's crisis proved to be a life healing, which was empowered through his gratitude and his search to find deeper meaning.

So gratitude itself is a very potent pill that doesn't come out of the laboratory of Big Pharma but rather the foundry of our soul, deep within the heart. The medical regimen of "two capsules three times a day" can apply just as effectively to doses of gratitude. Stop every so often and focus on finding the meaning behind your current challenges; if it is not apparent, "fake it until you make it" by paying homage to the principle of gratitude as the perennial healer. Let the universe and the people around you know that you are thankful for everything difficult in your life, affirming that there is a gift in it all, whether or not you have found it yet. And even if you haven't, the chances are that in your state of gratefulness, it will sneak up on you when you're not looking. The lights may suddenly go on and the matter will start to sort itself out in your mind as if by magic, facilitating clear-minded effective responses and deep peace.