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HEALTH

Thoughts on Sickness and Healing, Part 1

By [Dr. Trish](#) | [Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D.](#) | June 5, 2015



Illness may offer us unexpected opportunities for growth and healing.

While doing research for a writing project, I happened upon some inspiring thoughts on sickness and healing. And then, just before I was about to publish this post, I slipped on a wet New York city sidewalk, and ended up having to surrender to a lame arm, a funky ankle, and a bruised cheekbone.

What follows, here in Part 1, are these words of wisdom, as well as my own reflections on my "healing by accident." In [Part 2](#), I'll share a few suggestions on how you might apply these notions in your daily lives.

On sickness

All sickness is homesickness. This comes from Dianne Connelly, a scholar and practitioner of Five

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Element Acupuncture, who has written a book on illness, healing, and living. She writes: "All sickness is homesickness; homesick for ourselves, and for each other.... It is a call home to the ground of being.... our call to come home."

Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., a physician with spiritual leanings, suggests that for Westerners without a spiritual framework or practice, illness can be a "form of meditation:" an opportunity to become quiet, to reflect, and reevaluate our lives.

Reflecting upon these two perspectives, I'll offer that illness can be an opportunity to find our way back home, to a peace of mind we may not have known before.

On healing

The etymology of "heal" comes from the Anglo-Saxon root meaning "whole." I like to think of healing as a returning home to a state of wholeness. Not that we are never not whole. But we may not feel whole. We may feel broken, incomplete, in need of mending. Healing is that process of allowing for this mending of our brokenness, for our return to wholeness.

From Ted Kaptchuk, O.M.D.,³ a scholar of traditional Chinese medicine: "Genuine healing is a journey....into a broken and hurt self.... an opportunity to uncover the truth of who we really are...."

On healing by accident

My slippery fall, like many accidents, completely changed the course of my day, and the next several days. Like the detours that illness can offer us, my accident offered me an unexpected and circuitous route to a bit of healing.

My left arm was useless, my right ankle a bit funky to stand on, and with my bruised cheekbone, I looked a like a boxer with a shiner. (Mind you, I am not new to accidents or illness, as I've had my share.)

Dressing and bathing were elusive. Two arms and two hands were needed. And anything and everything else that required both sides of my upper body.

So, I had to stop, do nothing, and focus on minding my physical body – what it could and could not do. And listen to its signals, although somewhat unenthusiastically.

I scoured my practitioner tool box and practiced a bit of what I preach: I used some homeopathic remedies for pain and inflammation, I gave myself acupuncture (yup – it's possible), applied a pulsed EMF device to my arm, and I breathed a lot. I breathed and breathed and breathed some more. And I rested.

And in these moments of breathing and resting, a lot of feelings came up. Feelings that seemed to have nothing to do with this minor spill. Sadness. Grief. Anger. I allowed these, a bit reluctantly at first. But eventually, I did. And I rested some more, doing nothing. And I slept.

And then I felt better. By the next day, my ankle was stable, my left arm could almost work with the right to dress and bathe, and the cheek bruise had disappeared. I'm writing this at the end of the second day, so I can't yet give you the complete update.

But, bottom line thus far: my little accident forced me to surrender to doing nothing; to letting go of all that I had planned for the day; to being, rather than doing. I had to do less, and really, a bit of nothing at all. It forced me to be stiller, and to be with what was, in these moments of stillness.

Feelings arose. Releasing them, I felt lighter and freer. And in spite of my still ailing physical body, I felt calmer, more peaceful.

I had a sort of mini-healing experience, in these days of surrendering to my body, to surrendering to doing very little, or nothing at all. Those words of wisdom I shared at the beginning of this post, on sickness and healing, seemed to speak to me during this time. (I'll be writing on how doing less can actually allow for more, in an upcoming post.)

Applying these notions in our daily lives



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Yet, however lovely, prosaic and poetic are these notions that Dianne Connelly, Rachel Naomi Remen and Ted Kaptchuck offer, they may feel challenging to apply given the practical realities of our daily lives.

And my brief "healing by accident" certainly was not by choice. I wasn't seeking this healing, this do nothing time, this time for releasing some held emotions. (Some more on emotional healing in another post to come.)

In **Part 2**, I'll offer suggestions on ways to be with sickness, and on ways to find healing; all paths to finding our way home, to a peace of mind we may not have known before.

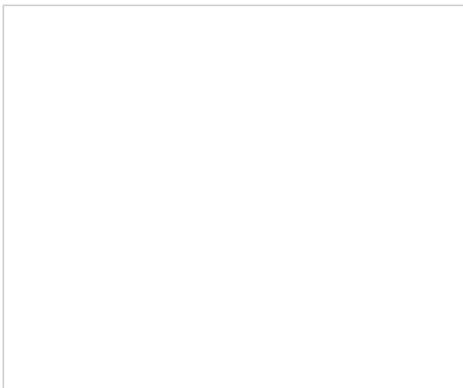
References and Suggestions for Further Reading

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