

Complete Healing

A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation

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I wonder if you've ever played the board game Trivial Pursuit? Trivial Pursuit is a board game from Canada in which winning is determined by a player's ability to answer general knowledge and popular culture questions. Players move their pieces around a board, the squares they land on determining the subject of a question they are asked from a card (from six categories including "history" and "science and nature"). Each correct answer allows the player's turn to continue; a correct answer on one of the six "category headquarters" spaces earns a plastic wedge which is slotted into the answerer's playing piece. The object of the game is to collect all six wedges from each "category headquarters" space, and then return to the center "hub" space to answer a question in a category selected by the other players. I remember playing Trivial Pursuit while at college in the 1980s. We added something extra to the game. If you answered your trivia question incorrectly you were required to imbibe an alcoholic libation. Now that I think about it, none of us ever earned all six wedges or finished a game.

I might have titled the message this morning "Wholeness." If you think about complete healing, healing completely, we are really talking about wholeness or becoming whole. Not unlike the trivial pursuit game pieces and the wedges. I wonder, is it possible for us to become whole, to put all the wedges in our game piece. We know it's impossible if you've been drinking. Can we have all six wedges in the game of our lives? Author and humorist Fran Lebowitz tells us, "There is no such thing as inner peace. There is only nervousness or death. Any attempt to prove otherwise constitutes unacceptable behavior." But she also says that "All God's children are not beautiful. Most of God's children are, in fact, barely presentable." If you are unfamiliar with Fran Lebowitz, I suggest you get to know her and her work. I disagree with Lebowitz. We can have inner peace, healing. Think of our search for peace and meaning as a game of trivial pursuit. Our game of life has only three wedges—mind, body, and spirit.

The key to healing the mind body spirit connection is to first, acknowledge that they are working in unison. Life disrupts our mind body spirit connection. We become so bogged down with work, family, and social obligations that we forget to take care of ourselves. To top it off, we lose sight of the things that bring us joy. You have heard people talk about the connection between the mind, body, and spirit. Many people have a hazy interpretation of what it means, but it simply pertains to an individual's mental, physical, and emotional/spiritual health.

You have likely noticed that when something is troubling you mentally or emotionally, you actually begin to manifest symptoms physically. Your heart starts racing, you may sweat more than usual, you have a hard time sleeping because you keep thinking about the problem – and you begin to feel lethargic and fatigued. This is when the mind-body-spirit are out of balance. However, when your mind is at peace, you are more likely to be happier, kinder, and more grateful, because you're not so embroiled from within. Physically, you are relaxed and ready to take on whatever life throws your way.

Dealing with struggles is a part of life that cannot always be avoided. Sometimes, we can be so hurt emotionally that we struggle to function in our daily lives. This is when our emotional wellness has been compromised and it effects every area of our lives, including in our mind, body, and spirit. What does emotional healing have to do with the mind, body, and spirit? We cannot separate who we are, meaning I cannot separate my mind from my body nor my heart from mind. I'm connected to all of me. The poet Mark Nepo reminds us to make of our lives a prayer...to stretch through the great pain of our lives in order to learn what it means to be alive. Nepo tells us all of our life can have the quality of prayer...a sacredness. "All that pain has taught me...is to unfold again as if never before...and be the prayer." My colleague, the Reverend Lynn Strauss, tells us, "We all have wounds - old wounds and new wounds. We all have sorrow." As we struggle with the pain of both body and spirit, we find ourselves coming here to church, to this congregation, to this hour of celebration of the joys and sorrows of life. As we struggle to heal body and soul, we engage in the spiritual practice of Sabbath. We come to a holy place. We pause. We listen and reflect. We let the music and the words wash over us. We, in our unique Unitarian Universalist way, make of our lives a prayer.

What do we know of healing? There's a beautiful book titled *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* by Christian Wiman, a writer and poet. Mr. Wiman wrote during the years he struggled to survive cancer. He questioned whether there was meaning in his illness. He questioned whether there was anything he could put his trust in. Facing death, he questioned the idea of God. Wiman writes: "Not long after I first learned that I was sick, in the dim time travel, multiple doctors, and endless tests, when it seemed that I might be in danger of dying very soon, I began to meet every Friday afternoon with the pastor at the church just around the corner from where my wife and I lived. I think he, like anyone whose faith is healthy, actively craved instances in which that faith might be tested. So we argued for an hour every Friday, though that verb is completely wrong for the complex, respectful, difficult interactions we had. Nothing was ever settled. And yet those hours and the time afterward, when, strangely enough, I didn't so much think about all that we had discussed as feel myself freed from such thoughts..are among the happiest hours of my life. Grief was not suspended or banished, but entered and answered. Answered not by theology, and not by my own attempts to imaginatively circumvent theology, but by the depth and integrity and essential innocence of the communion occurring between two people."

When we, ourselves, or a loved one are sick and suffering – we of the Western, post-modern world - do not, as a rule, turn first to religious or spiritual ritual. We first look for answers. We Google, we call for a conference with the doctor or the medical team, we seek out the latest therapy. And we try to answer the existential questions that begin with "Why?" We try to figure out how to bring order to the chaos of illness and to make peace with "not knowing" or not being in control. Being spiritual is being centered and having an understanding that you are part of something much bigger than yourself. Facilitating a healthy spirit includes being part of a community to share yourself with others, and to give without expecting anything tangible in return. A healthy spirit requires love.

Tell yourself, "I am alive!" Tell yourself there must be something more that I need to contribute in this life. That is the core of what it means to live your life as a prayer. That is the core of meaning, if there is any to be found, in illness and pain. Something calls us to Life. Something calls us to move toward healing...healing in body and soul. We come to moments of crisis, moments of pain and we are called forward. We find the meaning...there is something more I

need to contribute in this life. I've had trouble getting behind the popular "bucket list" idea. I believe what most people yearn for is meaning, not satisfaction. What we really long for is affirmation of our worth and dignity, not one more satisfying adventure. What we really long for is the chance to make one more contribution in this life. Healing happens through communion - a profound connection with life - and for most of us that connection comes in relationship. Rituals are ways to honor sacred relationships

Let us not stay within our own individual experiences of pain and healing. Christian Wiman writes: "The temptation is to assume our pain is more singular than it is. In truth, experience means nothing if it does not move beyond itself...have meaning, project meaning beyond ourselves. We are, each of us, every single one of us, meant to be a lens for truths that we ourselves cannot see. Kierkegaard once said, 'The system cannot include the systemizer.' To live in faith is to live toward a truth that we can but dimly sense, if at all, and to die in faith is to leave an afterimage whose dimensions and meanings we could never even have guessed at. Something of us is saved and made available for others." Wiman's point and mine is that through the process of entering our pain and finding communion in relationship as we heal, our wounds become ways to teach one another.

We are not for ourselves alone. Our healing is a path toward love. Thus we gather on Sunday morning, acknowledging our wounds and our pain, blessing one another with silence and song. Together following healing paths and learning from one another. Pain is part of living. Here we pause to share the healing of body and soul. That's what living on this earth is all about, building relationships and making meaningful connections. We need each other to thrive and live a full life, building a support system of trusted friends sure does make living more fun and joyous.

May it be so.