

The Great Balancing Act of Healing and Dying -- Stephen Levine

When I started this Newsletter, I promised myself that I would not skirt the issue of death and dying. I recalled the situation that compelled me to this position. The parents of a Leukemic child decided not to tell their 12-year-old child that she was dying. The stress this caused the hospital staff and the child profoundly affected me. I will never forget the looks of confusion on the child's face when she would get evasive responses from staff members who were obligated to honor the parents' wishes. I will also never forget the screams of the unprepared siblings, tears of the child's nurse and helpless feeling of the child's clown.

Imagine yourself in that child's place, being lied to and told you would be getting better, being avoided because everyone was running out of excuses, feeling worse and not knowing why. How much better it would have been to accept her death and prepare her and her siblings for her death. By avoiding the issue it made it unnatural. It was a cruel experience for this clown.

The following is an excerpt from Who Dies? An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying, by Stephen Levine. I highly recommend the book for everyone working in a hospital or hospice. -- *Shobi Dobi*

"The balance of the mind and heart is reflected in the body. When the heart and mind are not in harmony there sometimes occurs what we call disease (dis-ease).

'Healing is the title we give to the phenomenon of the mind and heart coming back into balance. When this harmony is restored, we say that someone is healed.

"It appears that the balancing of the heart and mind can either displace illness from the body or in some cases draw that being into harmony outside the body. In either case, healing occurs. When the attachment to preconceived results is let go of, there is little to maintain imbalance. As our friend wryly noted one day, "Survival is highly overrated."

"When the healer's priority becomes that each individual directly experiences their original nature, healing becomes a lens that focuses the potentialities of the moment. But if the priority is to change people, to "heal them," to take something away from them, then perhaps the most that can be expected is that the body may become somewhat stronger, but the weakness in the mind, the clinging that has always obscured the heart, is not affected or encouraged to dissolve.

"As long as we are thinking of healing as opposed to dying, there will be confusion. As long as we separate life from death, we separate the mind from the heart and we will always have something to protect, something more to be, another cause of in harmony and illness. When the attitude toward healing is in balance, the attitude toward death is as well.

"Sharing with various healers -- nurses, doctors, herbalists... I have sensed at times a tendency, slight or grandiose, that they believed they were doing the healing. It is perhaps that state of pride and separateness that most obstructs the conduit for the healing powers always available in the universe. But the greater the sense of separateness, of "someone doing something," the more attachment to results. They are not allowing healing, they are clamoring for it.

But the heart closes in the presence of such personal force, and harmony becomes less likely. It is by surrendering into the underlying sickness that one seems to be able to make available the essential harmony of being to another. Anything that reinforces the feeling of the "healed" as a separate entity removed from the universe intensifies the separation of heart and mind while it magnifies the fear of death and the disharmony that amplifies disease.

"The true healer is invisible . . . Ramana Maharishi, the Indian saint and teacher, was known as a great healer. Thousands had come to him and gone away in balance. There is a story that one day a doctor from the northern part of India came to visit him and asked, "I understand you are a great healer; I would like to know more about how you do it." But Ramana replied with an honesty and pureness, "No, I am not a healer, I don't heal anyone." The visitor said, "I've heard you have healed thousands." Ramana seemed sort of bewildered and said, "No, I don't heal." At that point one of Ramana's devotees turned to him and said, "Bhagwan, what I think the doctor means is that the healing comes through you." "Oh, yes! The healing comes through." He wasn't doing anything but allowing those energies which flourish in the universe to compassionately focus on any being who came near.

"When you are in just that kind of space, you are not forcing anything. You are not pushing away life or death. You are in reality not even attacking disease. You are just allowing balance to occur by being in balance yourself. Many healers have said to me, "I know God is doing the healing, I am just His stand-in" That is the space out of which healing can manifest.

"[The healer's] energy cannot come from the mind. His power comes from the oneness of his heart. He senses something greater than the body's predicament. He goes to the source out of which all healing occurs, not attempting to disturb or obstruct that which may allow the next perfect step. He does not second guess the universe.

"It is the attachment to someone getting well, the attachment to results that limits the depth and potential of the healing.

"When we are differentiating between healing and preparing for death we are forgetting that each are aspects of single whole . . . Death is not the enemy. The "enemy" is ignorance and lovelessness. Identifying with the contents of the mind we seldom trust the spaciousness of the heart. Indeed it may be that much illness is a result of our distrust of our greater nature: the disharmony that results when we pull back from the truth.

"For many it may be illness that for the first time causes them to look within. For some it might be the only experience that would get them to pay attention, to being exploring the mind/ body, to develop a sense of wholeness. For many it could be said that sickness is grace, for it brings them into contact with themselves in a way that none of the stumblings of a lifetime's attempt to maintain self-image have accomplished. It causes an examination of that which attempts to protect us from life.

"Some have told me that they have looked their whole life to find a teacher or a teaching that would bring them into some deeper wholeness and that at last it turned out to be their illness, that it was cancer that became the teacher, the mirror for the truth. For many, disease is the way back into life."

Who Dies, Stephen Levine, Anchor Books