

Wholeness, Health and Healing (Part 3)

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Let me now turn to Andrew Weil, who speaks of the body's "healing system" and asserts that the body, rather than being a (merely passive) recipient of our thoughts and feelings, actually wants to be well and, indeed, seeks to be well. Andrew Weil is a Harvard-trained physician who became disenchanted with some of the attitudes and practices he observed being followed by doctors trained in the Western medical tradition. Thus, following his own instincts and interests, he left in pursuit of a more meaningful understanding of the ways of healing. He has written a number of books about health and healing, (44) and is now recognized as one of the leading figures in the alternative health area. Indeed, he has been called "America's best-known doctor" (45).

In his book *Spontaneous Healing*, he writes about "the healing system" of the body. The main theme of this book is very simple: The body can heal itself. It can do so because it has a healing system. If you are in good health, you will want to know about this system, because it is what keeps you in good health and because you can enhance that condition. (46)

Not only does the body possess such an innate healing system, but "the body wants to be healthy, because health represents efficient operation of all of its systems." (47) He says that what we must do is "optimize the power and capacity of your healing system."

Weil devotes one chapter of his book to "The Role of the Mind in Healing" (48) and another one to "The Tao of Healing." (49) Such topics give some indication of where he is coming from in speaking about the healing system.

Weil asserts that when we are sick, it is not necessarily the doctor to whom we go for help who directly heals us, but rather we essentially heal ourselves, that is, healing very often occurs due to some mental factor. That is, once again, it is our thinking which makes the difference. Thus, "You must know how to use the mind in the service of healing." (50) If we have, in our own mind, a strong faith or belief in, for example, a doctor or healer to whom we might go for help, that in itself is significant. Weil asserts that one's "Belief in the healing power of some person, place, or thing can also be a key to success." (51) One might think of Lourdes, or even the healing stories in the Bible, for example. Weil notes that one common correlation he often observes "between mind and healing in people with chronic illness is total acceptance of the circumstances of one's life, including illness...Often, it occurs as part of a spiritual awakening and submission to a higher power." (52) He concludes: "Acceptance, submission, surrender — whatever one wishes to call it, this mental shift may be the master key that unlocks healing." (53)

Weil emphasizes that "The healing system is always there, always operative, always ready to work to restore balance when balance is lost; but at any given moment its capacity to restore may be inadequate for a required task." (54) The body is an incredibly powerful healer, if it is allowed to properly carry out its normal functions in the absence of the burden placed upon it by environmental toxins, pharmaceutical drugs, and other external agents, which we often introduce, or allow to be introduced, into our body. "One of the greatest threats to the system is toxic overload from the multitude of harmful substances in today's environment." (55) Weil adds, "If you want to increase the likelihood of spontaneous healing, it is imperative that you learn to guard against toxic injury." (56) In our modern society toxins are virtually everywhere around us, and we take them "into our body with the food we eat, the water we drink, and the air we breathe, as well as in the form of drugs we use, whether we obtain them on medical prescription, buy them over the counter, or use them recreationally." (57). There are both physical toxins and spiritual toxins. Weil states: "During my travels throughout the world I have met many healers who believe that the primary causes of health and illness are not physical but spiritual. They direct their attention toward an invisible world assumed to exist beyond the ordinary world of the senses. In this realm they search for reasons for illness and ways to cure it." (58) I will speak more at length about spiritual toxins, and the spiritual causes of disease, in a separate essay. Weil continues and says that "the short answer to the question 'Why do we get sick?' is that the capacity of the healing system to restore balance can be exceeded by the forces or circumstances of imbalance." (59) Such imbalance may often be caused by toxins.

In summation, Weil states:

I maintain that the final common cause of all cures is the healing system, whether or not treatment is applied. When treatments work, they do so by activating innate healing mechanisms. Treatment — including drugs and surgery — can facilitate healing and remove obstacles to it, but treatment is not the same as healing. Treatment originates outside you; healing comes from within. Nonetheless, to refuse treatment while waiting for healing can be foolish. (60)

Weil takes his observations down to the cellular level, as does Chopra. In *Healthy Aging*, in a section where he is speaking about the cell, he states: "DNA contains instructions for the manufacture of enzymes to repair itself and to neutralize potentially damaging agents. Cellular life represents a continual battle between the forces that damage DNA and the mechanisms of DNA repair."(61) Such "instructions," of course, are part of the mentality of the cell. How does the cell know to repair itself? The cell has a lower level consciousness, a "cellular consciousness," which is aware of such a condition. It should be noted that "the forces that damage DNA" include things like "chemical agents" (such as the toxins which surround us in our environment). Weil also states, however, that "recently, scientists demonstrated a direct correlation of objective and perceived stress on cellular aging."(62) Again, the way in which we think has an effect.

To sum up, here are some of the ideas which Dr. Weil has "found most useful" in his work as a doctor: "The body wants to be healthy...Healing is a natural power...The body is a whole, and all of its parts are connected...There is no separation of mind and body...The beliefs of practitioners strongly influence the healing power of patients."(63)

The body is ultimately our best doctor. It knows what it is to be well, it wants to be well and, if enabled to do so, it can make us well. Our responsibility is to take good care of it. We can do this by optimizing its healing system through our thoughts, feelings, emotions, expectations, etc., and by following simple, healthy lifestyle habits, including not abusing it with toxins, and so forth. Truly, it is God's temple. If we allow it to do what it is best at doing, it can heal itself. Weil outlines some of the factors which contribute to keeping our body, and thus our "healing system" in optimal condition. Among these factors he presents the following (64):

- 1) Adequate energy: healing requires energy which is supplied from our metabolism. We need to eat well and we need to metabolize well. He says, in his book *Healthy Aging*, that "throughout life the need for good nutrition is a constant."(65)
- 2) Good blood circulation: you can maintain your circulatory system in good working order by following a healthy diet, by not smoking, and by exercising.
- 3) Breathing: breathing may be the master function of the body, affecting all others.
- 4) Importance of the immune system: this is important in resisting environmental toxins in the air, water, soil, food, etc. We must avoid toxic injury as well as unhealthy mental states.
- 5) Spiritual problems must be addressed (this is a very important topic and it will be examined more deeply in later essays).
- 6) Activity and rest: human beings are meant to walk... walking is the most healthful form of physical activity, the one that has the greatest capacity to keep the healing system in good working order and increase the likelihood of spontaneous healing in case of illness. But activity must be balanced by rest. Adequate sleep is important, including adequate amounts of REM (rapid eye movement) level sleep. Dreaming is necessary for the health and well-being of the brain and mind.

It is notable that "energy" is included in the above list and, though we sometimes take it for granted, its importance must not be overlooked (a later essay in this book will examine the concept of energy and its place in our life in more detail). Weil notes that "healing requires energy" (66) and that the healing system depends on energy from metabolism. In his influential book, *Unlimited Power*, Anthony Robbins devotes a chapter to "Energy: The Fuel of Excellence" and outlines "a food combining chart for complete and efficient digestion." He states: "This 'Common Sense' chart will show you how fresh, vital foods properly combined will promote optimum digestion, energize and strengthen your body." (67) A perhaps more reliable guide, however, since it is formulated by a trained physician who has studied this very topic, is Weil himself. In *Healthy Aging*, he elaborates on a healthy diet and what it ought to contain. (68)