

## Wholeness, Health and Healing (Part 5)

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A search on the internet reveals more than 20,000 books on the topic of marriage, and the importance of stability, and love. Moreover, there is an abundance of literature now available concerning the importance to one's health of one's relationships with other people. Of particular importance, of course, are our relationships with those people with whom we have deep emotional bonds, the people we love: our family members especially, but also our friends and those to whom we feel close. This should not surprise us. Joan Borysenko, in her work with health and healing, tellingly states that "It's only through our relationships with others that we develop the outlook of hardiness and come to believe in our own capabilities and inner goodness." (76)

What I would like to consider here is a slight variation on the theme of relationships: the importance of ritual in relationships. I am not referring here to esoteric religious rituals, but to the simple rituals of everyday life, rituals in which we all participate, and which we often take for granted. To begin with, and to put things in the right context, consider this statement by Larry Dossey, a physician of internal medicine and former chief of staff, Medical City Dallas Hospital:

Medical researchers have discovered increasing evidence that loneliness is devastating for human health. In a well-known study reported from Alameda County, California, in 1979, about 7,000 people were surveyed about contacts with friends and relatives, church membership, marital status, and many other indicators of social connectedness. Nine years later, the mortality level of the group was assessed. For all age and sex groups, mortality was greatest for those with the fewest memberships or networks, and highest among the loners, those with the fewest relationships. (77)

Continuing:

In addition to the California study, a well-known study in Tecumseh, Michigan, showed that increased loneliness and absence of social networks were not the result of disease and illness, but the cause, and that social isolation predisposed to disease and increased mortality (House, Robbins, and Metzner 1982). (78)

There really is such overwhelming evidence on the importance of relationships for health, that there is little I feel I need to say about it. Nevertheless, I would like to draw your attention to an interesting article entitled "Ritual: The Foundation for Transpersonal Medicine," by Jeanne Achterberg, executive editor of *ReVision* magazine, and lead editor for the Winter, 1992 issue. This article focuses on the importance of simple social rituals and relationships, the kind that occur continuously in our daily life. In many cases a healing takes place in a way unexplainable by traditional approaches.

Rituals for healing have the purpose of giving credence and significance to life's transitions; they provide maps of form and guidance for behavior during perilous times when bodies, minds, and spirits are broken. The acts of ritual allow people to share their common experiences and to give visible support to one another. The symbols and events of healing ritual cement the healer/ healee bonds and engender faith and hope that the passage into the place of wholeness, harmony, or relief of suffering will be achieved. (79)

Rituals are able to bring healing because they "reduce the sense of alienation."(80)

Healing...would be that which reweaves the torn fabric of life. Feeling alone, different, unloved and rejected, or having lost a sense of connection to life are cofactors, or even primary factors, in the etiology

of many stress related cripplers and killers.., as well as psychological disorders and lifestyle problems, such as substance abuse, that destroy health. (81)

Thus, "any ritual that serves to reintegrate a disenfranchised individual or restore harmony will have the healing outcome of 'making whole.'"(82) Furthermore, "any healing ritual that facilitates the positive emotion of hope and reduces depression and anxiety can have a significant impact on a person's total well-being (including the physical). The senses of helplessness and hopelessness are well-known companions of depression and have been repeatedly shown to have a negative impact on health."(83) For someone in need of healing to be told that 'there is nothing more that you can do,' with no further information, is tantamount to prescribing a poison. There is always something you can do..."(84)

"Certain family rituals may also provide an important undergirding of strength during stressful times."(85) The importance of family activities cannot be underestimated:

Several important pieces of research have shown that even in families where both parents are alcoholics, if family rituals (defined as meals, vacations, visitors, evening and weekend activities, and/or holiday celebrations) are sustained during the times of heavy drinking, the children are unlikely to become alcoholic. (86)

One can also visualize the situation in a modern hospital, where a sense of relationship (closeness, warmth, togetherness, etc.) can sometimes be lost, unless particular care is taken to ensure some relatedness:

Encouraging rituals of support in hospital settings... not only enhances psychological well-being, but also directly facilitates the healing process. At the very least...studies support the continued presence of family and friends during medical crises, particularly if a person is in intensive care or in a life-threatening condition` — `the very times when they are now surrounded by machines instead of humans. (87)

What is apparent from these statements is the considerable power one's emotional bonds with other human beings have on one's health. If one is engaged in meaningful relationships, one is mentally strengthened in every way, and this has a powerful influence on one's health. Researchers "present studies and documented cases that suggest that nonlocal activities of human consciousness may have an impact on healing that cannot be totally accounted for by current scientific models of energy exchange."(88) We are left with the question: "What can happen emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and otherwise when thoughts, voices, movements, and/or states of consciousness resonate synchronistically?" (89) The phenomenon of "synchronicity" was first examined by the psychologist C. G. Jung (90) and has to do with "an a causal connecting principle," in short, "meaningful coincidences" which have as one of their chief causes "the emotionality of the human soul."(91) It can be said that "ritual engages the power of consensus."(92) Whenever we feel emotionally that we are not alone, we are strengthened. Andrew Weil recognizes the importance of emotional connectedness when he includes as one of the points of his "twelve point program for healthy aging, "the need to "maintain social and intellectual connections as you go through life."(93) In short, it is very important to stay emotionally close to those you love, and to keep your mind as actively engaged as much and as long as possible.

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*David met the TPs in 1972 while serving in the US Army in Korea, and studied UT with Dr Sang Hun Lee. Returning to America he taught UT at Belvedere, helped with MSG, YS and WM campaigns and was selected by True Father to attend UTS. Upon graduation, he worked in Upstate NY and was then called to UTS to teach DP, UT and world religions. In 2004 he returned to Korea, teaching at the Cheongshim Graduate School of Theology in Chung Pyung until 2014. He presently lives in Indianapolis, engaged in church outreach.*