

Sickness: A Blessing in Disguise

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*Note: The following is excerpted from a chapter of Dr. Le's upcoming book, *The Healer Within*.*

Many of us view sickness as an enemy that needs to be quickly vanquished. It brings inconvenience to our busy lives and hinders our daily responsibilities. Therefore, when we get sick, all we can think of is how to quickly get rid of whatever ails us so we can go on with our lives. However, if we investigate deeply, we will discover that sickness can serve as a necessary messenger to alarm us of unseen events that may harm us. It can be seen as a bridge we can cross from one state of being to another. It helps us reset our priorities, reconsider our purpose of living, and reinstate our ability to rise above adversity.

Sickness makes us slow down the pace of life and forces us to be humble. In many ways, illness, helps crystallize the reality of human existence that is uncertain and impermanent. I have observed many people whose sickness has become an imperative tool for self-discovery, discipline and spiritual development. It forces us to open our hearts and widen our horizons.

Western medicine considers a pathogen as something to be driven out of the body and killed, but this philosophy denotes that we are seeking to kill part of our own being. To the contrary, Eastern medicine sees pathogens differently and refers to them as "karma." Rather than rushing to find a cure for the sickness, we can realize that this illness is a way of paying more attention to the neglected body. It can also help us repay our karmic debt.

When some people become ill, they may slip into one of the pitfalls that hinders the healing process by attempting to read a lot of materials to find a cure for a problem. This action only clouds the left brain, and shrinks the right brain's natural, instinctive ability to initiate a speedy recovery. Therefore, the first action one should take when becoming sick should be to unclutter the brain and give it room to breathe the fresh breath of healing.

Emotions are what make us human - they are neither good nor bad. However, the way we express, perceive and distribute these emotions will have a great influence on our happiness and well-being. Sickness is a way to allow us time to re-examine our emotional state and how we handle our relationships with others.

All sickness of the mind and body is the result of the seven emotions: desire; anger; attachment; arrogance; pride; improper view; and doubt. In addition, sickness arises from internal tension and stress created by the uncontrollable false sense of satisfaction.

When people become upset by the onset of an illness, I always show them an optimistic view. No

matter what kind of sickness one attracts, it is always expressed in three stages: the development stage; the maturation stage; and the transformation stage.

The development stage is when the disease starts to take form. It may take days, months or years for a physical manifestation to occur. Along the way, we receive only small signals - and most of the time, we ignore them. This is where the second stage of an illness takes its turn.

The maturation stage may appear as pain, discomfort or a lump, and we become alarmed. The doctor labels our sickness as a certain kind of disease, and we begin to panic. This stage of illness gets everyone's attention, because we tend to react to it as a misfortune that just descended upon us overnight!

The third stage of the disease is the transformation period. Through the process of healing, we may have to make some changes. First, we may change our eating, sleeping and work habits. Second, we may even be forced to deal with issues in our lives that we never wished to unearth. If we can change our old habits and develop new attitudes, the sickness transforms our lives. If we resist change, we develop feelings of sorrow because the disease stopped us from working and living in the old, comfortable way. If this is the case, then we have fallen victim to our own illness. We can either become prisoners of sickness, or we can break free from the bondage of self-absorption. The choice is ours.

The physical form is not merely a composite of flesh and blood - it is the embodiment of light and color. Human life is made possible by the yang influence of heaven absorbed by the body. The development of man is made possible by the yin influence of the earth that flows to the body. Contained within these components are *jing*, *qi* and *shen*, whose quantities and qualities depend upon our karma and blessing.

When blood and *qi* flow freely, the body feels light and the spirit shines radiantly. However, when we exhaust our blessing, the reverse manifests. Karmic retribution causes the body to feel heavy, and it will produce a strong odor. The mind becomes confused and lethargic, and lacks clarity. Receiving healing from a true healer gives us an opportunity to rekindle the life force within.

If we can take sickness as a warning, we can change our lives. We can perform virtuous deeds to dispel external influences and increase our vitality. The future effect is a positive existence and the promise of a better rebirth. In this light, sickness is a blessing in disguise.

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