

Ten Reflections (10 of 10) Healing

May 3, 2024

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

reconciliation, health, healing, wholeness, complete, uninjured, undivided, divided, division, attached, fear, critical, hostility, humility, chaplaincy, interfaith, spiritual, religious, non-religious, atheist, humanist, psychophysical system, balance, homeostasis, non-interference, unfolding, Stephen Levine, hospice, sacred time, allowing, trusting

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Today I will reflect on the tenth of the ten reflections. In many ways I think of all the others as a foundation for this last one. I think of it as healing. So the previous reflection was reconciliation, today is healing.

There is a difference between reconciliation and healing in the way that I'm using the terms. Reconciliation is the healing we do socially. It is coming into wholeness, into communion, coming together with kindness, with goodwill, with others. Healing, as I use it here, is how we reconcile ourselves with ourselves, how we come into communion, to wholeness within ourselves. It is very significant that the English words "wholeness", "healing", and "health" all come from the same Indo-European roots through the Germanic, Scandinavian, and northern European languages. There's something about healing and health that means to be whole, to be undamaged, to be uninjured, and to be complete in a way.

There are times when we are at war with ourselves. We have values we believe in, but we don't live that way. We have ways of being and thinking and feeling that we think are not acceptable. We have to get rid of them, push them away. I've seen quite an intense standoff in some people, a kind of checkmate in the war between different parts of themselves. So we want to heal the divisions we have, to heal the ways in which we are critical of ourselves, angry at ourselves, hostile towards ourselves, heal the ways in which we are shut off from ourselves. One way or the other most people have some of these characteristics.

To be attached is to be divided. To have hostility towards others is to be divided in oneself. To live caught in fear is a way of not being whole. Of course there are good reasons to be afraid, and fear is a necessary feature of life in certain healthy ways. But there are ways in which people get stuck in ways that they're not full, not whole, not complete.

Of these ten reflections, I think of this last one as being the one that is closest to being religious. These ten reflections as I've introduced them come from the world of chaplaincy. In some parts of the US (like California) hospital, prison, and hospice chaplains are available to do interfaith chaplaincy, interfaith spiritual care. They meet people of other religions than their own, not to proselytize, but rather to support them in their own way. So the orientation has to be more spiritual than religious. These ten reflections have such broad themes that they also work for people who are non-religious, who are humanists or atheists. They are such fundamental human things.

As we get to this sense of healing, the possibility of healing, the trusting of healing, of wholeness, we find that there is a power within us over which we do not have full agency or control. This power can make things happen or do things that we don't need to resist or hold back from. It is something quite significant that, in my language, is a greater power within us that is not appropriated to that part of our identity we create as self and build up as a sense of self.

As I often point out, what I'm saying is not so strange. It's kind of like the natural power of physical healing from a cut. We can cut ourselves and physiologically it's a fairly complicated, multifaceted event for the body to heal itself. If we can just get out of the way of the healing, keep the wound clean, keep it from getting dirty, not pick the scab, the body has a way of healing up to a certain point. For example, I still have the scar from a deep cut on the back of my hand. This is the remnant, the leftover of a wound that is fully healed. That is the "certain point" when physical healing ends. I appreciate the scar that's left. It reminds me of my fragility, my mortality, all kinds of things.

The best part of the wholeness is to include that remnant of what's there. We may have something left over psychologically, emotionally, physically from the healing. But there is this power, this force, this ability, this capacity within that I can't say is "mine" in the sense that I identify "me" as the agent, "me" as the experience, or "me" as the doer. It's just lovely to relax and trust this deeper process. I still have a role to support that, but it's mostly a role of non-interference. Don't interfere with the healing that goes on.

This is also true in the heart, emotionally. It's true in the mind. Our whole psychophysical system is built to move towards balance, to homeostasis, to wholeness. We have a very sophisticated system within us that none of us fully understands. Similarly, at some point in Dharma practice, the movement towards wholeness, or to freedom, or to peace, or to being non-divided requires a radical kind of non-interference, a radical trust that allows for this natural maturity, the natural healing that our system is capable of.

If we're always riding close, like a kid in the backseat saying, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?", if we're always pushing and trying to make it happen, or scratching the scab, this natural process cannot happen. We have to come into some deeper trust that allows deeper movements within us to begin unfolding, opening, and coming into a kind of wholeness. Part of that process is healing, a personal healing, healing within ourselves.

Of course the reconciliation with others is not going to be independent from our healing in ourselves in the way I'm using these words. They're not separate, but there is a whole process of self-healing that goes on. For many people when they come to Dharma practice in the beginning, I think a lot of what's happening is healing. If you don't like the word healing or it's not quite right for what your process is, think of it as coming into a wholeness.

To some degree it's aided by a certain humility. Not the humility of belittling oneself or being submissive or anything, but the humility of not feeling like we know everything, we're in charge of everything, we can do everything ourselves and kind of just barrel ahead and make everything right. There is a humility that trusts and allows for the fact that we don't know it all. We're not the ones who do it or make it all happen. We have to allow some other process to unfold, make room for it.

Just the attitude of allowing heals some of the divisions that are formed by excessive self-assertion or self-deprecation. Humility is not self-criticism or diminishing yourselves. It actually heals that as well. It's a coming into a simplicity of being. From that kind of simple, humble wholeness or healing, we can still bring agency to our life. We can still do things. We can still live with dignity, value, purpose, and meaning, but it comes from a very different place. It arises within us, without stress, without strain, without creating further division either socially or personally.

I remember Stephen Levine, a wonderful teacher from many years ago, made the distinction for me between curing and healing. He worked with a lot of people who were dying. He was one of the pioneers of the hospice movement and working with death and dying. He aided and supported people in their last days of life, helping them heal in a psychological, emotional, spiritual way that didn't cure

them of their illness. It didn't bring them back into physical health, but it still helped them with a profound movement towards healing. One of the greatest things that we can do for someone who is dying, or we can do for ourselves when we are dying, is to come into that wholeness, that personal healing. It is possible. It's not at all the same thing as having a cure.

What is your own experience of personal healing – or of coming into wholeness, of becoming undivided, if you prefer. How does that work for you? How do you move into it? Is there space in your life to trust it more, to allow for it to happen? It takes time, and we have to give ourselves time. I like to call it sacred time for this process to unfold within us.

So those are the ten reflections, and I'm delighted to have shared them with you. Thank you, and I appreciate very much that I had this opportunity to reflect on these themes with you.