Facing the Fear

June 5, 2015 By Matt Starr

As before, I am tolerating hepatitis C treatment (ribavirin and Harvoni) much better than expected, and better than what most folks face at this stage of the treatment.

I believe there are lots of potential reasons for why I feel unexpectedly strong, which I've written about recently and which does not preclude plain old good luck.

This time, my energy level is great, and I am thankful for it. The combination, more than luck, of proper nutrition, moderate exercise, holistic treatments, spiritual practices, and activities that bring me peace through a connection with nature and creative processes, have all helped the medicine work and for the side effect of anemia to be minimal.

However, all this does not mean I live without fear. I have recurring questions. Will the treatments work? Even if they work, will there be a relapse months later? What is the outlook for my cirrhotic liver whether hepatitis is eradicated or not? What does my increased chance of liver cancer mean for my hopes for a long, healthy life?

The fear and worry list goes on, but my successful efforts to stay energetic and strong, along with many individuals and their stories, inspire me. The greatest of those inspirations comes from the Dalai Lama, who suffered the loss of his country after the occupation of Tibet. In *The Art of Happiness*, he details his approach to fear and human suffering--an approach that ultimately includes a belief in the possibility of freedom from suffering. This freedom starts with acceptance of the fear while courageously facing that fear and its problems head on.

This is why I regularly practice yoga, meditation, and much more. It is for the healing; the self-healing from within which opens my body to the efficacy of the medicines. That is what I strive to achieve. It is what I encourage you to practice as well, in whatever form. Live with gratitude and appreciation for what you have, face your problems head on. Don't run from the fears, but accept them as a real part of your experience.

In the book's beginning, the Dalai Lama writes, "Our days are numbered. We never know (whether we will live a few days or more than 100 years). ... a central question [still] remains. What is the purpose of our life? What makes our lives meaningful?"

For those of us battling illness, the answer to this question may be intuitive, and fit like a favorite sweater. His Holiness continues, "The purpose of our existence it to seek happiness." This philosophy lights a candle in my resolve. For me, that happiness he speaks of seems elusive, unless we can live with our worries and fears without them devouring us.

So, to give ourselves the best chance to live with vibrancy and health, I think we must be grateful for *what we have, not what we had and lost*. We can achieve that without ignoring our fears, but by accepting them while being positive and happy, regardless of our setbacks.

Even with your loss, whether from hepatitis and liver disease or other setbacks, answer these questions for yourself. What makes your life meaningful? Can you discover deeper happiness? How?

This search will help you be more vibrant and healthy. There is no scientific proof of this, but I believe it, based on my experience and that of others. Is seeking happiness for yourself and others worth the effort?

I think so. *What about you?*

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