

A Course in Miracles and Cancer

by Ali McDowell

Even though cancer seems to be increasing by epidemic proportions, there is enormous potential for prevailing over cancer through *A Course in Miracles*. As a two time cancer survivor, I know the feeling of the overwhelming fear that immediately strikes. It instantaneously assaults and never totally wanes in your mind until you identify and face your fears and learn to completely surrender all to God.

A Course in Miracles states that we have forgotten who we are, believe we are alone and in separate bodies, “*The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world. Its abilities can be frequently over evaluated.*” ACIM, P20, p2. It reminds us that our ego self created the body and then filled it with guilt and fear, so it unconsciously controls our behavior. “*A sick god must be an idol, made in the image of what its maker thinks he is. And that is exactly what the ego does perceive in a Son of God; a sick god, self-created, self-sufficient, very vicious and very vulnerable. Is this the idol you would worship? Is this the image you would be vigilant to save?*” ACIM, T, P172, p1.

Studies conducted in this unreal world that we believe we live in, show that conscious or unconscious fear and guilt within are destructive and detrimental to our health. Unfortunately, world-wide news, crime, disease, movies, TV programs, commercials, pharmaceutical companies and more, all promote fear. Fear prohibits you from enjoying the present. It forces you into the future and leaves you with no ability to change today. “*Whenever you are afraid you are deceived and your mind cannot serve the Holy Spirit.*” ACIM, T, Pg 19, p1.

Similarly, fear is the most universal and defining emotion elicited by a diagnosis of cancer. Fear comes in many forms; anxiety, worry, guilt, terror, hatred, dread, panic, concern, judgment, feeling scared, and self-criticism. While fear is a natural human reaction to cancer, anxiety created by fear sends stress hormones into the body, negatively affecting the functioning of the body. Fear and guilt compromise our body at the very time we need to maximize our natural healing bodily functions.

Our tendency is to deny fear because it is intimidating. But if we recognize, acknowledge and allow fear in all of its forms as quickly as possible, we neutralize or minimize the stress to the body. In doing so, we deal with fear immediately, not by denial which intensifies the destructive capability of fear, but by employing appropriate techniques.

ACIM says that the world we think we live in is an illusion built on perception rather than knowing. The world is simply not there and that if we teach ourselves to see through the lens of forgiveness and atonement, we discover pure love. “*Perception must be straightened out before you can know anything. To know is to be certain and certainty is strength. Perception is temporary. As an attribute of the belief in space and time, it is subject to either fear or love. Misperceptions produce fear and true perceptions foster love but neither brings certainty because all perception varies. That is why it is not knowledge. True perception is the basis for knowledge but knowing is the affirmation of truth beyond all perceptions.*” ACIM, T. P35, p4.

Back in the '70s, as a working nurse, people fascinated me because I recognized a connection between illness and anxiety. I observed friends, co-workers, and patients in relation to circumstances and the development of simple illnesses, or deadly diseases. As I watched, a trend emerged. Almost 100 percent of the time, their illnesses (and mine) were preceded by guilt, stress/anxiety, either physical, emotional, or a combination of both. My observations showed that people became ill after a traumatic experience with love, relationships, family, or work. I noted that they frequently experienced an illness within six months of divorce or a death of a significant family member, or due to arguments, or stress at work or home.

I felt there was an obvious connection between stress, anxiety, and illness that was being ignored by the medical profession. I speculated that maybe those problems weakened the immune system, causing people to be more susceptible or vulnerable to colds, flu, etc. My thirty years of informal research convinced me that guilt, anxiety, stress and worry produce fear; and, prolonged fear within creates disease. “*Only the mind is capable of error. The*

body can act wrongly, only when it is responding to a misthought. The body cannot create, and the belief that it can, a fundamental error, produces all physical symptoms.”

ACIM, T, P19, p4.

The following studies seemed to concur that stress could indeed negatively affect the immune system. A study of Harvard students, for example, tracked the levels and function of immune cells during periods of stress, and the results demonstrated that many different kinds of stressors, including preparing for an exam, relationship problems, and financial difficulties, led to a decrease in healthy immune cell function.

Another study by Ronald Glaser, Ph.D., of Ohio State University College of Medicine and Institute for Behavioral Medicine and Research, compared 119 caregivers of spouses with dementia with 106 people of similar ages not living under this type of stress. Blood tests showed a chemical called Interleukin-6 sharply increased in the caregivers. Interleukin-6 has been shown to be associated with several serious diseases, including heart disease, arthritis, osteoporosis, type-2 diabetes, and certain cancers. The increase in Interleukin-6 was found to linger for as long as three years after the care-giving role had ceased.

I became convinced that the mind affected the body. So when I developed cancer, I recognized I needed to explore how my thinking had affected my body. I discovered I was a guilty worrier, and realized fear and other negative emotions were stressing my body. Most importantly, I admitted that my mother's death from cancer had produced my worst fear, that I, too, would get cancer. For fourteen years I carried a fear of cancer and now it was my reality. Disease created by the mind? How can that be? But that is exactly what ACIM teaches. *“If God created you perfect, you are perfect. If you believe you can be sick, you have placed other Gods before Him.”* ACIM, T, P173, p4.

As a student of ACIM, I was determined to make the necessary transformation within my mind, changing my thoughts, and beliefs about life on earth. My discoveries were empowering, I found the works of MDs Bernie Siegel, Carl Simonton, Andrew Weil, and Deepak Chopra. I listened to tapes, read their books, and concluded that I carried a multitude of guilt, worries and fears. For the first time, I observed myself objectively and found I was not having fun, I worried too much, and I was way too serious.

I decided that I spent too much time trying to please others. Consequently, I was filled with anger, worries, feelings of not being good enough, and feeling alone and different. I also had a strong tendency to be critical and judgmental of myself and others. I was harsh with myself. Though I was a hard worker, I judged my appearance, my performance at work, and my abilities; I realized I expected perfection, and because I tried to be perfect, I expected others to be perfect.

I judged others as I judged myself, but my harshness was mostly self-directed. In fact, for years my husband tried to tell me how self-critical I was but I couldn't hear it; my hair was too curly, I was too fat, I needed to make more money. I was never good enough. The fact that I enjoyed an extremely successful career directing an agency for New York State did not influence my opinion or decrease my negativity.

ACIM has been a powerful ally in my life through both bouts with cancer by learning to see life differently and by changing my thinking. *“You can do anything I ask. I have asked you to perform miracles, and have made it clear that miracles are natural, corrective, and healing and universal.”* ACIM, T,P 15, p4.

Through the process, I found miracles. I learned that I could actually choose to feel peace. As a psych nurse, I was taught that one could not help their feelings. I learned through ACIM that, in fact, I was always making choices and that I could choose to see peace rather than anger, hurt, or judgment. I learned that I was responsible for my feelings. It was powerful. I was powerful.

During my first episode with cancer, I walked every morning and listened to my intuitive guidance and was given messages to practice and follow. At the same time, while attending ACIM groups two to three times a week, I would

hear the identical messages heard earlier in the day repeated in my group, either by the leader or another participant. After such concrete confirmation, I realized it was no accident that I was receiving the same messages from different sources. The group always reinforced the message without knowing I had heard it earlier. My trust in an inner guidance was growing and expanding.

I was given the way daily if I listened. I learned through experience and hindsight. I believe there are no accidents or coincidences. I trust that every situation offers a lesson that I need to identify, listen to, and learn from. ACIM reinforced that every person, event and mistake presented opportunities and lessons. Our challenge is to identify the life lesson and the gift in every difficulty presented. ACIM convinced me that I had a choice; I could be positive or I could be negative. I could choose to see opportunity instead of mistakes. I could forgive myself and others or I could judge both. I could choose to like me or criticize me. Forgiveness and love brought joy and peace while judgment and anger brought anxiety and disappointment, so I learned to forgive. I didn't always want to forgive. I am human, but I forgave because I knew it was healthier for me, my life and the people around me.

All that said, ACIM also clearly states that the very fact that you are afraid, makes your mind vulnerable and recommends that you use present day medical assistance to help you heal.

“Physical medications are forms of “spells,” but if you are afraid to use the mind to heal, you should not attempt to do so. Under these conditions it is safer for you to rely temporarily on physical healing devices, because you cannot misperceive them as your own creations. As long as your sense of vulnerability persists, you should not attempt to perform miracles.” ACIM, T, P21, p2.

I used both the spiritual mind and the medical profession. Since we believe we are on this earth, we are free to utilize every effective treatment or remedy available and should if we want, use all means to help ourselves heal.

ACIM is the greatest gift of my life. While assuring us that we are one with God, it still leaves us with the responsibility to join as one, release our guilt, forgive and give love to ourselves and everyone else we think is here. That is true happiness.

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