



What Now?

BY **CHRISTINE ROBINSON**, MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Fifteen years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer. I had what the surgeon called a “strenuous” surgery, was off work for nearly three months and debilitated for another six. But...it was OK. The results of the surgery had been the best possible, and this kind of cancer wasn’t supposed to come back. I spent the last month of my medical leave polishing a sermon about what I’d learned from having cancer, and from the debilitation of the treatment. I got much more out of that writing than you could imagine. And then...a shadow on a scan. It looked like it might have come back.

Of course, every cancer survivor knows that it might return, but my kind wasn’t supposed to. Because of what the doctors told me and because of my own inner experience of being healed of that cancer, I hadn’t expected it to. It was all over with. Cured. Recovered. Gone. There was always that dread chance of a recurrence, but it was slim enough to forget about, and dire enough to be worth the energy of denial, so I was utterly unprepared for the news that I needed another surgery, even though not (probably) for cancer. And among the many feelings and thoughts and questions that swirled through my battered self was that universal and universally futile one, “Why me?”

“Why me?” We ask it when things are not going our way, and it is not a bad question. It is a part of trying to assert control over a situation that seems out of control—a very healthy thing to want to do. It is a part of trying to accept responsibility for the things that happen to us, and that is a good thing as well.

“Why me?” however, is a question with an attitude. It has an assumption behind it, which is that Somebody ought to be in control around here, and that Somebody ought to be able to keep a handle on things: a good and fair Somebody who doles out consequences in some kind of proportion to the goodness and badness of each person.

Well, I know that I’m not that Somebody. And I strongly suspect that you aren’t. And I don’t even believe that God is, so I don’t know why I keep asking that question!

I try to remember that the best that you and I can do in this life is to exercise influence. Influence is a more subtle word than control. When we have influence, we can shape a desired end, but not assure it. We can influence our health, but not control it. We can eat right, exercise, watch our stress levels and wash our hands—and all of those things make a difference, but doing them offers no controlling guarantee.

Even the healthy and virtuous die sometime; some even die young because of errant viruses, troubled classmates, evil governments, cancer cells, or runaway trucks. So should we throw up our hands and eat Twinkies in front of the TV? By no means. We need every ounce of influence we can muster. But we need to always remember that no matter how good we are and how well we do, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune can—and probably will—strike. And after we’ve had some time to rail at our fate with questions like, “Why me?” we can turn to something a bit more productive.

Even though the orthodox call God omnipotent, I have never thought that God was in control. I mean, just look around! No God worth calling God would let babies die, or fail to keep guns out of the hands of disturbed youth. Any omnipotent God worth his salt would have cleared up the situation in Afghanistan a long, long time ago. And what good does a tornado do, I ask you?

Nope. I couldn’t possibly believe in a God who was in control of this world, not with my head or with my heart. The God I believe in is, like me, stuck with influence. The God I believe in gives me strength to do what I have to do even though I didn’t deserve to have to do it, and then urges the hearts of those around me to help me through it all, and might even give me an extra shove or insight or strangely warmed heart. But that God can’t control my life any more than I can. The God I believe in, that basically unnamable force, can stir the waters and the

Quest

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Again, again we come and
go, changed, changing.
Hands join, unjoin in love
and fear, grief and joy.
The circles turn, each
giving into each, into all.
—Wendell Berry

A monthly for religious liberals

HEALTH AND ILLNESS

- WHAT NOW?
Christine Robinson
- HEALTH
Christine Robinson
- BOTH WHOLE AND HEALING
Barbara Wells ten Hove
- BOLDLY CO-EXISTING WITH
MENTAL ILLNESS
Adam Gerhardtstein
- ANOTHER HELPING OF BROKENNESS
Naomi King
- BURNT KABOB
Mevlâna Jalâluddîn Rumi
- FROM YOUR MINISTER
Meg Riley
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING
Lynn Ungar
- OUR BIRTHRIGHT OF HEALING
Rachel Naomi Remen

soul and urge on us a new possibility, but this force learns and waits and works with what is left just like we do, only bigger. So I can't demand of the universe, "Why me?" It's the wrong question. A better question is: "What now?"

It's when our lives are out of control that we are offered the opportunity to experience something new and perhaps grow from it. "What now?" This thing has happened, how are we going to deal with it? Will we be inspired to new ways of life, led to new insight, motivated to find greater meaning in our lives? Unlike "Why me?" "What now?" is an answerable question. We don't choose crisis because we want to grow, but growth is nearly always available as a byproduct of those uncomfortable, out of control times. We may not like it one little bit. We might not even think that what we gained out of it was worth the suffering, but at least we gained something.

Perhaps the archetypal story of suffering and waiting and learning is the Greek myth of

Demeter and Persephone. As you may recall, Demeter's daughter Persephone is stolen away by Pluto and taken to the underworld to be queen there. A grieving Demeter searches for her daughter while forgetting her duties as nurturer of the earth, and when Zeus notices that nothing is growing and his

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subjects are starving, he orders Pluto to let Persephone return to her loving mother.

But since Persephone has eaten three pomegranate seeds she must spend three months underground each year, which is why we have winter, and her joyous return to Demeter is the reason for the warmth and beauty of spring.

The focus of this story is on Demeter, on her love of her daughter and her devastating grief and her insistent demand that her child be returned to her. All fine and good. But what struck me as I pondered my own experience of illness and suffering was: what about Persephone? What happens to her? You have to dig a bit beyond the "Child's Introduction to Greek Mythology" to find out, because we want the children to focus on mother love and parental care.

What happened to Persephone was that she was abducted, raped, tricked or seduced into eating the pomegranate seeds, and had to take the consequences for a part of every year for the rest of her life. Hardly a child's story. It takes a grownup to resonate with this story: a grownup who has discovered that life isn't fair, that beauty and innocence have their dangers, and that we live by the consequences of our experiences even when we did not choose them.

It takes a grownup to appreciate what Persephone did the next fall, after she had been

(What Now? continues on page 3)

Health

BY CHRISTINE ROBINSON,
MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

I was listening to a tape about health during my hospital stay, and it defined health as the ability to fully participate in one's life. That stopped me. I had to rewind the tape and listen again. Maybe I'd heard wrong, lost my concentration; surely I must have missed something. But no. The tape said, "Health is the ability to fully participate in one's life."



It was quite a jolt. Here I was, hardly able to get out of bed by myself, but I *was* participating fully. I was smelling my roses and lis-

tening to my tape and trying to figure out why some of the nurses seemed mad at my nurse and enjoying my broth and looking forward to my next visitor. Was I, in short, being healthy?

I had to cry over that for a while. I had been thinking that I'd lost my health. I had been grieving that loss, even while doing everything in my power to get it back. But if health is the ability to fully participate in your own life, then it is possible to be vibrantly healthy in spite of handicaps, lurking illness, pain, even depression. It is possible to fully participate in your life when you've had cancer. The gift of illness, for as long as one survives to enjoy it, is the motivation to even more fully participate than you might have if you had stayed blissfully well.

I have a friend who is a long term cancer survivor. She has gotten a lot out of being in a cancer support group in her small town. One of the regular

features of this group is that every semester the local school of social work sends one of its (usually young) students over to observe and learn. The young social work students are often stunned at how happy and free these cancer survivors seem, even though many are enduring difficult treatments, relapses, and the possibility of premature death.

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one's life.

The group members get a big charge out of explaining to student observers that the group itself helps them to take their illness and wring its gifts from it, so they can return to the rest of their lives knowing what is important to them and determined to participate fully. That is health. ■

(*What Now?* continued from page 2)

back at her mother's side. With protection and a guide, she left her mother willingly this time, and returned to hell to be queen of the underworld, as was her fate. The unexpected part of the story is this: she chose to find meaning in her fate and to turn it to good by becoming a guide and protector of the dead, for this is what the initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries believed her to be.

And thus, for four thousand years, twice as long as dying mortals have commended their souls into the loving arms of Jesus, dying mortals counted on the loving protection of Persephone, daughter of the mother Goddess, whose fate and privilege was to be queen of the underworld and guide to the dead.

Persephone returns to her mother's arms and love, to sunlight and laughter, and that is what matters most. But she doesn't survive unchanged. Nobody comes back from the underworld unchanged, not even a goddess. She can't recapture her innocence, her virginity or her childhood. Nor can she avoid going back to the underworld, time and time again, and those times do not pass without touching her, either.

The grace in the situation is not that she returns from her experience in the underworld unchanged. The grace is that she is able to make something good out of such a difficult situation, that she can find a way, even in hell, to do something meaningful for herself and helpful to others.

Fifteen years have passed since that second surgery, which found no cancer, and I couldn't be happier for my continued good health. But I have not lost track of the lessons I learned from my own personal trip to the underworld. It's a matter of finding grace and growing a soul in the midst of it all, even in adversity—a matter of learning, waiting, and returning to work on what remains. The difficult, terrible things that eventually happen to all of us are not put there to make us change, but if we can learn from them or find new possibility in them, then even the small and large deaths in our lives will be healing. ■

Both Whole and Healing



BY BARBARA
WELLS TEN
HOVE, CO-
MINISTER, CEDARS
UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
CHURCH,

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, WASHINGTON

I was diagnosed with a chronic pain disorder when I was 35 years old. Though my symptoms can be traced back many years earlier, I had managed to, well, manage the pain for some time. That was no longer possible. Finally getting the diagnosis was a relief, but what it meant for my future was uncertain.

Would I have to take medication? Yes, and some of it actually made a difference. Would alternative therapies help? Some, but not all, and the journey to discover which was which is ongoing. Would my family and friends look at me differently? Yes, and no. Those who love me still love me. Those for whom my doing was more important than my being struggled.

Could I continue to work full time? No. After a few years it became clear that I would have to cut way back. Luckily, I could job share. My work is still fulfilling. But a day does not go by when I don't hear myself saying, "If only I were better—I could do so much more!"

When we become ill, we discover what it means to be a human *being* as opposed to a human *doing*. There can be extraordinary guilt when we realize that many things we assume about ourselves when we are healthy are no longer true. Whether a temporary setback (with recovery likely) or a chronic condition (to be managed, not cured), illness challenges us to see ourselves in a new light and to accept our humanness.

When we are sick or injured we suffer. Symptoms may range among pain, disorientation, an inability to move or care for oneself, loss of sleep and appetite, etc. Our bodies betray us. Drugs, therapy and care from medical professionals and loved ones can ease our suffering. But it is up to us to find a way to accept that pain and suffering are a part of being fully human.

We cannot wish them away, but we can learn ways to work with our suffering instead of fighting against it. Each of us will find our own path to healing—a word that comes from the same root as

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wholeness. Accepting that we are whole even when we are ill or injured is a first step toward healing.

Dealing with chronic illness and pain is a constant dance between perseverance and acceptance. If I give in to it fully, I might never get up and do what I am capable of doing. Yet when I push myself too hard, the price I pay is high. Balance has become my mantra. That, and learning to truly live one day at a time. I try to take good days as gifts and let the bad ones roll off my back, realizing that most days bring a little of both. Life in the midst of the suffering can be hard, but it is still living. And life can be good and hard at the same time.

I find myself turning to a spiritual truth of our grace-full faith: we are challenged to do good things in the world, *and* all people have inherent worth and dignity. I don't have to earn God's love, I just need to accept it. And I need to accept that illness does not make me any less whole. ■

Boldly Co-Existing with Mental Illness



BY ADAM G. GERHARDSTEIN, MEMBER OF THE CLF BOARD, CINCINNATI, OHIO

In my senior year of college I had a psychotic manic

episode and was hospitalized for two weeks. At 21 years old I received a lifelong companion, bipolar disorder.

My new companion overwhelmed me for almost two years. I was doped up, depressed, and I gained 50 pounds. During that time I remember going to my psychologist and just sitting in her office, silent. Thankfully, she would not poke and prod me, force me to speak or demand that I act. She would just repeat a mantra during those otherwise quiet hours, “Give it time, Adam. Give it time.”

I took her advice and I found ways to pass the time. I managed to graduate from college. I only had a semester remaining, so I dropped my international affairs major, took art, dance, and a literature class and got a general liberal arts degree. I spent my time between classes sleeping in my car. Then I got a job that demanded little of me. At home I slept, watched TV, smoked on my balcony, ate microwave dinners, and read Harry Potter. And reluctantly, yet consistently, I took my medications. This was my life for 19 months.

Then, in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon, something changed.

It was our first family vacation in many years. Our plans dissolved within 24 hours when our guide, who we had depended on for all our reservations and transportation, turned out to be a swindler. We were left to our own devices and had to marshal all our talent (and Portuguese) to make it up on the fly. I had been very nervous going into the trip because Brazil seemed so far

away from my carefully nurtured post-traumatic comfort zone.

But when our plans fell apart, I found that I had something to contribute: my humor.

Growing up, my older brother had been the hot one and I was the funny one. But for the year after my hospitalization, I made very few jokes and most of my smiles were forced. Then, in the jungle, in the embrace of my crazy hectic family vacation, when we all needed a little comic relief, I was able to play that role. I had them cracking up!

I was reminded on that vacation that I have a role to play in this world. I am a brother and son. I am a community member and a friend. I am a talented change agent. I realized the most important thing in my life was to play those roles well, and to do so I had to learn to boldly co-exist with bipolar disorder.

When I returned to Cincinnati, I made some changes. I joined Weight Watchers and dropped my weight. I started exercising and reading the news. I looked for jobs in the international affairs field and found one in Washington, D.C.

I had a lot of help to make these changes. I made a major adjustment to my medications and for the first time they were helping. My professionals continued to support me. My mom found the job posting. My brother and sister-in-law were in D.C. and helped me adjust. I was on my way.

Now, I am nine years into my journey with bipolar disorder and I have learned a lot. I am vigilant about my physical health. I eat well, exercise, and am fanatic about getting solid sleep. Nothing throws me off kilter like sleep deprivation. To this day, I still occasionally practice the “give it time” doctrine. When I fail to care for my needs, or life just gets the best of me, my first resort is retreat. I make sure all my urgent commitments are taken care

of, then I turn off my phone, curl up in my bed, stream Netflix or read a ridiculous novel and avoid the world for a while. Sometimes, I catch my fluctuation earlier and I go for a long bike ride or walk a labyrinth and that does the trick.

When I have a persistent funk, I seek out professional help. I have found help from psychiatrists, psychologists, many ministers, a psychic, and a shaman. But the biggest tool in my wellness toolbox is self-awareness. I have been forced to develop an objective view of myself. It is up to me to identify when I am losing control and figure out a way to get it back.

In many ways I am blessed. I have always had access to good professional help and I have a circle of family and friends who have always been there for me.

It has been a journey, but I have learned to live boldly with bipolar disorder. I became a leader within Unitarian Universalism, helping launch and manage the UUA’s *Standing on the Side of Love* Campaign. I met a woman who was definitely out of my league before I was diagnosed, and now she is my wife. I’ve earned a law degree, passed the Bar Exam, and am now practicing law with a civil rights law firm. I have accomplished this without another trip to the hospital and I’ve avoided slipping back into a depressive stupor. But my bipolar disorder is always on my mind and plays a role in every major decision I make.

During some frustrating moments my psychiatrist in D.C. reminded me that no one escapes life without having some heavy rock they struggle to push up a hill. Some of us face a Sisyphean challenge where each day’s triumph must be redone tomorrow. In that way, we may be absurd heroes. But each night when I pop my pills and lay down next to my wife, my never-ending struggle toward the heights is enough to fill my heart. ■

Another Helping of Brokenness



BY NAOMI KING,
DIGITAL MINISTER,
ONLINE EVERYWHERE

I am prone to sudden jerky movements that are beyond my control. The other day, I was out on an errand. As happens so often when I go out, I experienced how we judge one another. And how sometimes we are both spectacularly loud and spectacularly wrong in our judgments.

“That, right there,” an adult said to a youth while pointing me out, “is why you need to not use drugs. God has blessed her and let her live. But you can’t count on that kind of blessing. Just say no to drugs.”

“Some people,” another person opined aloud on this same trip, “shouldn’t be allowed out without their keepers.”

I find blessings in my experiences with disease, but this trip wasn’t full of those moments, just full of social sin. But later, recounting this story to someone else with mobility limitations, we started sharing horrible stories and laughing together, recognizing the judgments aimed at us, our own defensiveness and judgments in return, and how easy it is not to cherish and hold onto our common humanity, but to break us apart into enough and less than enough, saved and damned, whole and broken.

The really humbling bit is that I still catch myself judging others with judgments I would hate to have leveled at myself. It is a brokenness that awakens me to being more attentive to my promises and to trying again to live fully into my beliefs.

When you think about what kinds of blessings you welcome, does another helping



of brokenness figure into those imaginings?

I’m not rushing around to go break something so I can experience the blessing of brokenness again. I can trust with my own fumbblings and falls that brokenness is not far off. I may feel my life is blessed by grace, but I’m also prone to the disappointment, devastation, radical transformation, and losses that are the common experiences of brokenness.

Often brokenness is an experience of social sin, when we are separated from the whole, othered, found wanting, and left out.

But often brokenness is an experience of social sin, when we are separated from the whole, othered, found wanting, and left out. Individual control is denied and taken away, as we are classed and cleared away by bias. It is possible to create astounding blessings out of that experience, especially with others who also know the burn of that social sin, when resilient communities awake and grow strong, proud and loud out of oppressive situations. To speak of the blessings of brokenness is to give voice to those whose voices have been systematically stripped away and denied. But only those whose voices have been denied have the right to name the experience of the social sin of brokenness as a blessing.

The persons judging me in the store did not have the right to name my experience. If I had been asked, I could have named many blessings from my living with chronic disease. But with my voice denied once again I had to work through that experience of brokenness, and find and create new blessings from it.

Would you really like another helping of brokenness? ■

I am in a nursing home, and this church is a blessing in my life. Enclosed is my check to support the CLF. I count on “Quest” to help me stay sane and see me through the months ahead.

—a CLF Member since 2005

Remember, the CLF needs your support! Your gifts are easily made using the enclosed envelope, visiting us online at www.clfuu.org or giving us a call at 617-948-6166. ■

Burnt Kabob

Last year, I admired wines.
This year, I’m wandering inside the red world.

Last year, I gazed at the fire.
This year I’m burnt kabob.

Thirst drove me down to the water
where I drank the moon’s reflection.

Now I am a lion staring up totally
lost in love with the thing itself.

Don’t ask questions about longing.
Look in my face.

Soul drunk, body ruined, these two
sit helpless in a wrecked wagon.
Neither knows how to fix it.

And my heart, I’d say it was more
like a donkey sunk in a mudhole,
struggling and miring deeper.

But listen to me: for one moment,
quit being sad. Hear blessings
dropping their blossoms
around you. God. ■

by **Mevlâna Jalâluddîn Rumi**,
translated by **Coleman Barks**



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Recently, at one of CLF's online worship services, we featured a guest minister, Teresa Ines Soto, who lives with cerebral palsy (tiny.cc/sotohomily). Her story prompted several of our members to say that they also live with cerebral palsy, which caused me to reflect on the fact that I had not known that about them. I realized then that one gift of online worship for people who live with illnesses is that they get to decide exactly what the rest of us know about their health, and when and how they tell it. And with this choice, they get to decide when and how to interact with people about it.

It's a human impulse, to want to help someone who's in pain. And so we constantly offer our well-meaning tips to others about how they might manage their health, as we might suggest a good delicatessen or shoe sale, perhaps not understanding how sensitive a topic this might be. And how extremely wearying it can get for the people who are receiving these tips.

When my then-pre-teen daughter developed migraine headaches so severe that the fetal position and sleep was the only way to survive them, many well-intentioned people told me what we ought to do about this. After a while I wanted to hand out little slips of paper that read, "Yes, we have tried all the medicines the doctors have suggested. Also acupuncture, homeopathy, meditation, biofeedback, massage, physical therapy, and eliminating particular foods. I am sorry to learn that someone else you know also suffers from migraines. Thanks for your prayers and good thoughts."

Someone I know, whose kid had life-threatening cancer, said that sometimes

she felt that managing all of the suggestions people gave her rivaled management of the cancer itself. She wanted to scream when well-meaning people would aggressively tell her about what she *must* do—one person wrote her a note that said her refusal to try a particular therapy suggested she didn't really love her kid!

Another friend, living with the ongoing uncertainty of chronic fatigue syndrome, faces not only a barrage of treatment suggestions but also (implicitly or explicitly) the implication that she might be making her symptoms up, that the whole disease exists only in her mind.

. . . It can get extremely wearying for the people who are receiving these tips.

And yet, the suggestions come from good intentions. None of us wants to see someone else suffer, and if we can think of a way to help them, we want to!

And it's hard to know what to say when we're uncomfortable. So I was intrigued recently to read a system for considering what to say to people about illness. It was developed by a therapist named Susan Silk when she had breast cancer. I read about it in the *LA Times* (<http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/07/opinion/la-oe-0407-silk-ring-theory-20130407>).

Susan has developed a simple technique called the Ring Theory. Here it is:

Draw a circle. This is the center ring. In it, put the name of the person at the center of the current trauma. For Katie's aneurysm, that's Katie. Now draw a larger circle around the first one. In that ring put the name of the person next closest to the trauma. In the case of Katie's aneurysm, that

was Katie's husband, Pat. Repeat the process as many times as you need to. In each larger ring put the next closest people. Parents and children before more distant relatives. Intimate friends in smaller rings, less intimate friends in larger ones. When you are done you have a Kvetching Order....

Here are the rules. The person in the center ring can say anything she wants to anyone, anywhere. She can kvetch and complain and whine and moan and curse the heavens and say, "Life is unfair" and "Why me?" That's the one payoff for being in the center ring.

Everyone else can say those things too, but only to people in larger rings.

When you are talking to a person in a ring smaller than yours, someone closer to the center of the crisis, the goal is to help. Listening is often more helpful than talking. But if you're going to open your mouth, ask yourself if what you are about to say is likely to provide comfort and support. If it isn't, don't say it. Don't, for example, give advice. People who are suffering from trauma don't need advice. They need comfort and support. So say, "I'm sorry" or "This must really be hard for you" or "Can I bring you a pot roast?" Don't say, "You should hear what happened to me" or "Here's what I would do if I were you." And don't say, "This is really bringing me down."

I love the simplicity of the Ring Theory. Shorthand for it is "comfort in, dump out." If it works for you, I commend it to you.

Wherever your own health is now, and wherever it may go tomorrow, may you find places to comfort and be comforted, to kvetch and to listen to the kvetching of others. This is the very stuff of life, and what we're on the planet to offer each other. ■

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



I don't know about your family, but in my family healthy eating is an ongoing battle. Yes, I am the kind of parent who generally thinks that junk food is bad, and vegetables are good. Not surprisingly, my daughter is equally strong in her opinion that junk food is good, and vegetables are to be avoided at all costs.

I try to point out how insisting that she eat vegetables is an act of love on my part, a way that I look out for her health and try to create habits of healthy eating that will serve her well as she grows up. My daughter tries to point out that she thinks broccoli is disgusting, and why don't I buy Oreos? I wouldn't say that either one of us has really won this battle, although I know that the older she gets (and she's now in high school), the less control I have over any aspect of her life, most especially what she eats.

So perhaps you'll forgive me if I turn to you as someone who might actually listen to my sage advice about healthy living. Yes, I know that the Internet is full of articles about 10 things you should do or eat or not eat or do or not do in order to be healthy. Well, here's mine:

1. My daughter and I are both right about **healthy eating**. I have a kind of equation for this: the sum of healthy + delicious should be as large as possible. (There's probably a mathematical symbol for "as large as possible," but I don't know what it is.) You shouldn't just eat junk food, even if you think it's delicious, but you shouldn't spend your life just eating things because



they're good for you if you hate them. The world is full of all kinds of edible things, some of which are bound to be both healthy and delicious. Sure, it won't kill you to choke down a few super-healthy things that you don't care for, and it also won't kill you to have a few Oreos, but it's worth tracking down as many things as possible that you really love that make your body feel good as well. In my world that includes berries, Greek yogurt, oatmeal and dark chocolate. Not all in the same dish. Although that might be good, too.

2. **Do something every day that makes you sweat.** As with the food, try to combine health and pleasure. Find something that you really think is fun to do that also gets your blood pumping. Play tag with the dog or your siblings or your kid. Ride a bike. Put on music and dance around the living room. Go for a walk. Go to YouTube and find a video that will teach you how to belly dance or do ballet or twerk. Find an 80s jazzercise video and laugh at the outfits while you dance.
3. Speaking of which, **do something every day that makes you laugh.** Laughing is totally a part of good health. Call your funniest friend or cousin, watch a funny movie, read a funny book, watch funny videos of cats, whatever. But laugh.
4. **Spend some part of every day with other people, and some part alone.** You might be an extrovert who really loves being in a crowd, or an introvert who needs a lot of time by yourself, but all of us need some of both. Find the balance that is right for you, and recognize when you need more of one or the other.
5. **Spend some part of every day in silence.** Turn off your electronics. Get quiet enough that you can hear your own heart. It doesn't have to be for long, but do give

yourself a few moments where you take in as little as possible.

6. **Spend some part of every day with music.** Make music yourself. Sing along with the radio, or sing in the shower or drum on the table or play the violin or whatever feels like your kind of music. It doesn't have to be something anyone else would want to listen to—that isn't the point. This is for your health, not someone else's listening pleasure.
7. **Spend some part of every day in nature.** Dig in a garden. Go to the park. Climb a tree. Listen for birds. While you're at it, remember that your own health is tied up with the health of our entire planet.
8. As often as you can, **be in physical contact with another being who loves you.** Hug a friend or family member. Relax with a cat in your lap. Lounge on the floor or the sofa with a dog.
9. **Spend some part of every day doing something just for yourself.** Know what makes you happy—what truly brings you joy rather than just covering up the stress or boredom—and make sure you have at least a little bit of every day devoted just to that.
10. **Spend some part of every day doing something for someone else,** not because you have to or you get a reward for it, but because you chose to give of yourself. Practice random acts of kindness, or have little things you do as part of your everyday routine. Give yourself the pleasure of knowing you've done some bit for the health and happiness of the wider world.

I can't promise that if you follow my ten suggestions that you'll never get sick, or will be miraculously cured of what ails you, or even that you'll live longer. But I do believe that you will be healthier—more sound in body, mind and spirit—which is, as I keep telling my daughter, the goal. ■



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The tools and strategies of healing are so innate, so much a part of a common human birthright, that we believers in technology pay very little attention to them. But they have lost none of their power. People have been healing each other since the beginning. Long before there were surgeons, psychologists, oncologists, and internists, we were there for each other. The healing of our present woundedness may lie in recognizing and reclaiming the capacity we all have to heal each other, the enormous power in the simplest of human relationships: the strength of touch, the blessing of forgiveness, the grace of someone else taking you just as you are and finding in you an unsuspected goodness. ■

by **Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.** from her book *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal, 10th Anniversary Edition* published by Penguin Group in 2006.

