

Journey of a Wounded Healer

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1. Poor Brother Ass

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More than halfway through my seventh decade on the planet, I experienced a stroke. I choose not to use the more common phrase “suffered a stroke” because suffering is something we ourselves create, not a circumstance inflicted upon us. None of us can avoid pain so long as we live, but it is our choice whether that causes us to suffer or not.

This is not a mere semantic difference. My stroke was painful and, over the course of the first several days, humiliating in the extreme: I could no longer control my body; my mind had a mind of its own. Some of my worst fears were realized, now portrayed and projected in the flesh for all to see. What had I done to cause the stroke; what had I not done that allowed it to happen?

I was guilty as charged: a fool who did not treat well the most valuable asset he has: his own mind and body, his consciousness. I often treated my body, as St. Francis of Assisi referred to his, as “poor brother ass.” Had I squandered my personhood for an extra plate of fish and chips or more pints of beer than any sane person required to get over even the worst of days? Was I a fool or a criminal? Either way this was payday. I had reaped what I had sown.

The stroke may or may not have been my fault, considering the role of genetics. But it could easily have been fatal. I might remain half-paralyzed for the rest of my life. I might continue living for who knows how long, but I choose to not suffer in my current condition. I will have to work as hard as I can to get over the effects of the stroke. This seems hardly a choice at all to me, though the results will be uncertain.

I could not go back and undo the stroke and maybe not even the behavior that may or may not have led to it. I did, however, choose not to suffer because of it. It was an enlightening moment and one that made me feel extremely powerful: in some degree I could steer the future course of my life through an idea. By simply thinking about it, I could choose not to suffer. I am no longer either the victim or the perpetrator. I am instead an observer, one with the power to affect the actions on the stage simply by thinking about what I wanted the actors to do. It is an exciting prospect and I cannot wait for the curtain to rise.