

## Journey of a Wounded Healer

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### 10. A Stroke of Luck

9 August 2014

I often joked to myself and friends that since I spend so much time outdoors, I would likely be found dead in the woods. The worms and insects and foxes would make use of me and, after a couple of autumns, my remains would be buried beneath a blanket of moldering leaves. The thought does not frighten me: such an outcome seems fitting. The day of my stroke, now one month ago, I came perilously close to achieving that scenario. The Old One, as Einstein referred to God, could have finished me off with a single stumble and fall, a single stone placed six inches to the left. That He did not suggests I have more work to do. I have no clue what that work might be, but I shall sit still and listen.

What I mean by God changes like the weather, hour by hour. I am constitutionally unable to accept anyone else's notion of who or what God is, much less their notions of what He or She wants from us or for us. The more specific the belief and the more unbending the propitiating behavior required to remain in His good graces, the more ridiculous I find such a system. Why would God play favorites and only speak to some of us? I find God in nature and in the stillness of my mind, and I often find both inspirations at the same time.

Am I a pantheist? Sometimes, especially when I am out in the woods. Am I an atheist? Sometimes, especially when others proclaim they have received God's direct counsel.

If God exists as a being worthy of having devised such an astounding creation, It is an entity so beyond our current powers of perception and abilities of comprehension as to be practically unknowable except in ineffable flashes. I think any of us can get a glimpse of God when our minds are empty of chatter and our hearts are compassionate. To attach any specific details to this always very personal experience is to tell lies and mislead others. Each of us is capable of experiencing God in his or her own way.

If God wants anything from us, I like to think it is to be exactly and fully who we are, as She made us, and to have compassion for all our fellow creatures. While that may be a simple concept, it is not an easy one to fulfill. It is a life's work.

I feel closest to God when I am in my garden. I observe the miraculous happenstance of life and observe myself noticing it, who is also enmeshed in the web of life. My consciousness holds a mirror to the universe, giving back a small bit of what has been provided for me. It is at these moments that I am serene, and not desirous of anything more.

While having my stroke out in the woods, I did not fear for my life or limbs. I trusted that I would be all right and accepted what was happening to me as something beyond my control. My sole mission was to get back to the house and phone for help.

Not once did I think of the stroke as punishment or as a lesson whose meaning was beyond my comprehension. It is in the nature of Nature that all things sicken and die. But I did not believe my time had yet come. I strove to reach help.

What I learn from the stroke is a matter of my own choosing. I could ignore it—a kind of denial—and possibly contribute to having another stroke, even a fatal one. I could carry on as though there was nothing to be learned. But neither of those ways of regarding it suits me. They seem wasteful and stupid. I have tried to learn from every experience life brought to me and to become a better person for having accepted whatever it was. I am not always a quick study, either. Often an experience has to be repeated, often more than once, before I can glean all that I may gather from it.

As George Eliot remarked, we are everywhere faced with a “hard, unaccommodating Actual,” yet I have thrived. My life has been so rich and so blessed, and I have so few regrets, that I feel as though I have already lived two very good lifetimes. It appears now that a third one is being offered to me and I can only accept it with gratitude, building upon what I have learned in the previous two. Having approached so closely the brink of death, I am not the same person in either mind or body. (To be honest, I don’t see mind and body as quite distinct.) I want to make of this new lifetime all that I can, both to my own benefit and to that of everyone I encounter. I want to make the most of this great stroke of luck.