

Recovering Spirit

By Jeannine Walston

Several neurosurgeons agreed surgery was the first step in my treatment plan for a brain tumor. Only 24, I placed my emotions aside and allowed my intellect to take charge, gathering information on a number of options from different cancer centers.

But how do you make such an important decision? Something deep inside said give it a few days. Kneeling on my living room floor, I peacefully surrendered to stillness and focused on each treatment center and the option it recommended. Only one option felt right—a surgical clinical trial at the National Institutes of Health.

Today, five years later, I recall other moments where I felt in touch with an innate wisdom. The day before my surgery, an elderly woman approached me to share a study on prayer's role in improving health. Another came on the morning of my 12-hour procedure when I sat in my hospital room looking out the window, trusting in a higher power. I found a sense of comfort.

While the time since my diagnosis has been a significant healer, the stronger comfort comes from spiritual development, including what I have learned about the world and myself. The world, more than what we see, comprises both a physical and spiritual realm. The spiritual realm is immediately present, and is grander than most ever allow themselves to know. I have learned from my spiritual connection that I am never alone, feeling the presence of spirit guides who watch over me in times of distress and joy. My connection with the spiritual realm has also allowed me to confront death. I've learned that by facing death, we can embrace life more fully.

My spirituality is built upon trust in the process of life. Lessons can be taken from every experience. Through spiritual engagement, I've cultivated the belief that I'm not broken. I have chosen to view myself as whole. I do this by clearing my mind, sitting still, focusing on breathing, exercising, chatting with a loved one, and spending time in nature. Sometimes we only need a reminder that we are whole, and this mindset fosters peace within and around us.

My trust in this process has grown in part from intense personal suffering. Through my recognition of suffering, I have developed compassion for others and myself. The value I place on a compassionate, open, and loving heart has become a major part of my spirituality.

Opening to spirit has awakened me to life. Each of us has distinct experiences and beliefs. We can choose to explore new possibilities through engaging spirit. Some start this process by defining their spirituality, and the journey continues to unfold through its embrace.

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