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Unread Messages

From Your Body

Healing Communication with Your Internal World

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A Message from Me to You

On the first day of my very first job, I found myself working at a psychiatric ward in the countryside. I donned my crisp white medical gown and headed upstairs to check in with the chief physician. I was a little apprehensive about meeting him since I had heard so much about him. He was regarded as a stern, eccentric, reclusive, and enigmatic man; he had absolute authority within his department; both patients and staff feared his words. I recognized him at first sight. I was sure it was him. He walked with an air of confidence and radiated a sense of superiority. His clothes were impeccable, his slicked-back hair glistened against his wise skull. This man definitely had a strong aura.

As I observed him, I got momentarily distracted. Oh, if only I could be such a clever, extraordinary, impressive person... I wondered how much you'd have to live, experience, and ponder, to become like him in his old age. To have the ability to rise above the mundane day-to-day struggles of life? To acquire such poise, such character?

I summoned up all my courage and walked up to him.

"Good morning, chief doctor," I said, looking him straight in the eye, with the naiveté of a fairy-tale shepherd, "I am your new colleague..."

He glanced at me, raised his eyebrows, and said:

"Fine. Report to the nurses, downstairs," and he was on his way.

I stood there astonished for a while, as I was expecting a bit more kindness from him. At least a question, a "Nice to meet you" or just a friendly nod... Although if I'm being honest, I shouldn't have been surprised. He was exactly how the chief physician would and should be.

I walked down to the nurses' room where I was greeted by a chorus of cheerful, good-looking nurses. Their smiles widened seeing my long hair, my hesitant movements. I told them the chief doctor had sent me. They exchanged glances and smiled even more. Then they started laughing, one of them even spilled her coffee. She cursed happily, then took pity on me and explained:

"The Chief is off today. I think it was Bela, you've met."

Bela was one of the twenty or so "veteran patients" who had been stuck in the hospital for decades. He was allowed to walk around in a white coat all day. This wasn't even the most far-fetched situation I've experienced there...

I consider Bela one of my first masters. No one had ever turned my worldview upside down so quickly and prompted me to re-evaluate everything I thought I knew about the world. He taught me modesty and humbled me, in a way. He reminded me to be more cautious with the seemingly obvious and urged me to use categories like "sick" and "healthy" or "normal" and "abnormal" more carefully. He had me laughing at myself.

That was the day that sealed the fate of my medical career. I was reborn: in the sense that I opened up, I was able to imagine everything as well as the opposite of everything. I embraced the new, the unusual,

the unconventional, and the radical. I started to study natural medicine, complementary medicine, and read more spiritual literature as well. My supervisors didn't like this new approach. They often warned me against it, and expressed their worries. One of my professors even went so far as to bury the handout of a specialized course I planned in his drawer, and with this move, managed to halt my teaching activities focusing on this subject for a whole year. I was only able to defend my Ph.D. dissertation after a decade of work, and in the meantime, I myself had become chaotic, different, strange; an outsider who had difficulties fitting in.

One night a few years ago I had a dream that I was in a staff meeting in a psychiatric ward (a bit of a surprise, as by that time I hadn't worked in a hospital for over a decade). I was sitting in the back of the room, with the calmness reserved for outsiders and superiors. A woman sitting next to me unexpectedly disrupted the professional boredom of the meeting. Her voice was clear and strong. It felt like she wanted to shake up the audience. For a moment, her spontaneity and boldness stunned everyone. Then, a few people began to understand what she was all about: the possibility of awakening the soul and freeing it. She was talking about discarding the professional stereotypes, about revealing our purest and cleanest selves, about breaking down the ramparts of defense. After the woman stopped, she lifted her skirt, pointed at her private parts, then looked into the eyes of the men who were blinking, intimidated, and left the room. Many followed her, instinctively drawn to her awakening. Those who remained inside eyed the others warily, waiting to see if anyone else moved. Finally, the squirming subsided. I sensed that it was time to make my choice. What do you think? Did I stay or did I go?

I first encountered the mud-like sight, the crackling sound, and the unsettling smell of decaying human flesh in the dissecting rooms as a medical student. I immediately knew that this horror – this ruthless and indifferent "entropy" – must have a counterpart in the world. A brother, an enemy, a lover. It must be Life, Life that is everywhere, glowing with strength, confidence, hope, and love. And it occurred to me that the sole purpose of the medical profession should be to serve this Life.

During my first night on duty in that rural hospital, I spent hours curled up in a small chair, helplessly watching a woman in a safe enclosure bed tossing and turning incessantly. Elizabeth, who was a proper lady not that long ago, had been brought in by tired paramedics that afternoon. Under my bewildered eyes, she turned into this otherworldly creature in a ghastly cage with alarming rapidity. Her nails got chipped, her fingers turned bloody from helplessly shaking the net that was placed on her bed to restrain her. Her hair was a mess, her eyes were bloodshot. At times she begged for help, other times she cursed, and her voice was growing hoarse. I didn't know how to help her and wasn't sure what to do with myself. Something elementary, something deep and simple was missing then and there. After a while I couldn't even comprehend what I was doing in that place, or even who I was... And somehow, we both survived that night.

This woman, Elizabeth, had become my second master. She taught me to endure the sight of suffering, to bear the agony of helplessness. She showed me what it was like to be hurt because someone else was hurting. As we were looking into each other's eyes, I understood that although the restraining net was

on her bed, it was there to protect me, to keep me safe, because I was much more afraid of her than she was of me. I understood then that a person struggling with illness reflects my own illnesses, that we are connected beneath the surface, that I can no longer be a cool, detached observer of someone else's drama. Since then, I've been trying to listen to the story of each of my clients as if it was my own, as if it was about me, as if it was teaching me, warning me, trying to wake me up.

I met my third master, Mary, in the hospital as well. She was a cleaning lady in her forties who was terrified of aliens. She claimed to be regularly visited, molested and harassed by them in her own home. The medical team diagnosed her with paranoid schizophrenic disorder and prescribed a chemical straitjacket. She was dizzy from all the mind-numbing drugs, but her obsession with aliens had not wavered. She was assigned to me because the other doctors thought that I was good with strange creatures and hopeless cases. They asked me to try my best. After all, there was not much to lose.

Mary's stories about the aliens gave me goosebumps. It reminded me of Woody Allen's line: *"How many of us have not at one time or another felt an ice-cold hand on the back of our neck while we were home alone?"* (Not me, thank God, but some have.) I saw that those aliens were just as important in Mary's reality as me currently talking to her. I realized that I better accept her reality temporarily, because that is how she had perceived it. There is an old saying about empathy: *"When you enter another person's world, do not forget to take off your shoes."* So, I entered politely. And then I noticed something: Mary had never greeted the aliens. She had not communicated with them. Rather she was terrified and was suffering. I suggested to her that when they entered the living room, she should gather all her courage and just say hello to the creatures.

She did what I asked her to do and from then on, everything had changed. The creatures had become friendlier, they weren't so scary anymore. Encouraged by this development I made another suggestion. I told her she should ask them to cure her of her physical ailments. She was suffering from scoliosis and chronic cholecystitis. A few days later, when she arrived for our session, she looked rejuvenated. She stood straight, her hair and eyes were shining, her cheeks were rosy and her spirits high. We were utterly amazed.

After that many wonderful things happened to her, and the aliens – who by then had turned into wise spiritual teachers in her mind – gifted her new abilities: she learned to see inside the human body, to heal with energies, to sense thoughts and so on. A few years later I ran into her somewhere. She was in great shape. She looked harmonious, happy and content. She had given up her job as a cleaner and was making a living as a healer and a mentor. She was surrounded by an army of admirers and people suffering from serious illnesses waited in line to make an appointment with her.

Mary had become my master by sharing her strange experiences, which helped me realize that even the most frightening situations can bear wonderful gifts. I learnt that openness and relationship-building can work wonders. That communication is worth attempting, even in situations we consider impossible, ridiculous or hopeless by our everyday minds. It's not tragic to not understand everything that's

happening or to be uncertain about what causes healing. We should simply allow room for the process and trust that things will turn out for the best.

In retrospect, even I am surprised how deeply these encounters with three of my earliest masters had shaped my medical beliefs, which I would summarize like this:

- To remain open to the new, the surprising, and incomprehensible
- To build real connections with those who come to me
- To allow myself to be touched by someone else's story, by their suffering, to let myself look in the mirror through them
- To think in terms of collaboration, not just one-way teaching and healing
- To focus on the essence and the whole, not just on diagnostic labels, to seek and understand the message of symptoms
- To facilitate good communication between the parties involved (people, mental processes, bodily events, organs, cells)
- To seek a peaceful, love-centered resolution for a conflict or a stalemate instead of (or, if necessary, in addition to) fighting symptoms and engaging in chemical warfare
- To believe in healing, even if it is unlikely, even if it requires a miracle
- And through it all, to keep my sense of humor, my cheerfulness and playfulness.

So, what *is* the message of our bodies? Well, during my lectures, sometimes I pretend that I have a one-word answer to that question but I'm not giving it away just yet... I'm not going to disclose "the solution" right now either. On the one hand, because it has to be revealed in the rest of the text. On another note, I would like to accompany you on the path that leads to this simple answer – which I promise to unravel before the end of this book.