

### The Seven Levels of Illness and Healing: A Modern Fable

Once upon a time in a far-off realm, seven students of the art of healing were gathered for their final examination. Their mentor, who was old, wise and greatly loved by his pupils, led them to the bedside of a patient they had known well in life. Alas, he had just given up the ghost, and as the students contemplated with sadness and wonder his lifeless form, the master posed the question.

“My dear pupils, you knew him well, and we grieve his passing. Death comes for all of us, but why did it come for him now? Why did he die?”

The students were among the best and brightest of that realm, and they pondered deeply the master’s question, but hesitated to speak. Finally, one student, who had been in deep meditation, spoke.

1.

“Honored teacher, you have taught me much, and I have also learned from the wisdom which the stars speak to me. It is clear to me that our friend and patient had lived out his destiny. He had completed his karma for this life. He freely chose his path and followed it to the ends of his god-given capacities. He could make no further progress within the limits of the soul and bodily constitution furnished to him in this life. So he—his spirit--

departed his body for higher realms, to begin work on a new body affording his spirit and soul further progress when he returns. It was ordained by his own higher will and of course by God's will.

The master was silent, but another student spoke up, a bit impatiently.

2.

“Yes, yes,” she said, “we know about karma and reincarnation, but there is a more proximate cause of death here, one closer to the reality of this fellow's life as he lived it.” The others regarded her expectantly, as she continued, “The spark had gone from his soul, he had lost all interest in life. He had given up, he had lost his will to live. That's why he died.”

3.

They all pondered her words in silence. Then another student summoned the courage to speak. He began hesitantly, “We all know that our spirit and soul have a guiding influence on our health in the course of our lives, but it was his *body* after all that failed him in the end. For weeks before he died his pulses were so weak I could barely feel them. His chi, his life forces were utterly exhausted, and his organs had no energy to function. His adrenals especially were shot. He was utterly stressed out, fatally depleted of the force and energy of life.”

4.

Now a few students began to speak. “Yes, I agree, I agree” said one, “but we’re neglecting the most important factor, his lifestyle. He was a very gifted man, but he neglected his health terribly. He ate, drank, smoked and used drugs to excess. He would work, or party, at night and sleep during the day. Women loved him and he greatly and frequently enjoyed them. His life consisted of chaotic highs and lows, totally lacking in any rhythm or consistency. And he never got any fresh air or exercise. It’s no wonder he exhausted his life forces!

5.

Now the students became more animated. “Yes, he was very complex and very talented,” said one, “an intense and passionate soul. We will certainly miss him. But I agree that his lifestyle was torture for his body. I’m sure his cells and organs were so stressed that they were unable to properly carry out their breathing, digesting and self-cleansing life processes. This caused stagnation and congestion, leading to a build-up of cellular wastes and toxins. I am absolutely certain that the levels of toxins in his blood were sky high. And that’s what killed him in the end—he was utterly toxic. He died from his own toxicity, and his exhausted organs were

unable to eliminate the poisons in his body. He could no longer detoxify, so he died.”

6.

The remaining students spoke at once, excitedly. The master’s eyes widened, but he remained silent. One voice broke through, “Yes, one could see from his tongue and from his eyes that he was toxic, but what follows toxicity as night follows day ...? Why, infection of course!” he exclaimed. “We all know that as surely as garbage and manure attract flies, much of the toxicity and waste matter in our body will attract the bacteria and other vermin that normally live in, on and around us. I am sure he died of an infection. He had a very high fever, he was septic!

7.

Now, all had spoken save one. The last student looked at her colleagues with admiration, and spoke slowly and thoughtfully. “I can’t disagree with anything that has been said,” she began, “but I have been studying the most recent research, and it seems we have neglected the ultimate and most proximate cause of our friend’s demise. Yes, he had an infection, and was septic, but in the end it was his own immune system that killed him.”

The other students were incredulous. “How can that be?! That’s impossible!” they exclaimed. A faint smile crossed the master’s face, but he remained silent.

The last student continued, “Yes, until recently the immune system was thought to be always protective, except of course in autoimmune diseases. But now science has discovered that our immune system produces chemical agents in our body that can sometimes harm us and even kill us. These agents, called *cytokines*, are of many different types: the interferons, the interleukins, the tumor-necrosis factors, and others. Some of these cytokines create and intensify inflammation in the body and other cytokines inhibit and shut down inflammation when it has done enough of its cleansing work. When our body works harmoniously, then our cytokines create just enough mild inflammation to destroy excessive microbes and to maintain the ongoing detoxification of our bodies, without causing symptoms. But just as the same fire that warms our home can also burn it down, so too, when our immune system is grievously provoked by severe imbalance, toxicity or infection, it can aberrantly unleash a “cytokine storm,” a massive outpouring of cytokines into our blood stream. These then cause a systemic inflammation to flare up in us and rage out of control, causing high fever, septic shock, or generalized sepsis and a severe dysfunction or shut-down of

major organs often ending in death. That is what finally killed our dear departed friend and patient.”

The students were silent, alternately lost in thought and gazing at one another in wonder, reflecting on all that had been said.

Though reluctant to break the rich silence, with great emotion the master finally spoke:

“My dear pupils, your words and thoughts have warmed me to the core of my being, and brought joy to my heart. Though I have but little knowledge, I believe that all that has been spoken is true. Before my wondering soul, you have unfolded a continuous chain of causation from the heights into the inner depths of the human body, stretching from spirit into matter. At each link of the chain, we might discover a different way that the human spirit, soul and life force can work together harmoniously in the body to create health, or work in conflict with each other to create illness in the physical body.

You are now ready to go out into the world as healers. My teaching is done, you will learn from your patients now. But remember always the seven levels of illness you have learned today. None of the illnesses you will encounter will have only a single cause. Many levels work together in health and illness, and you must never judge on one or two levels alone.

You must remain aware of all levels of causation from highest to lowest, regardless of whether you can see through them or not. That will give you the necessary measure of humility to truly heal.”

Then the seven students, having passed their final examination, bid farewell to each other and to their beloved teacher and went out into the world to practice the art of healing. They were unsure in their knowledge and understanding, but their will to heal was strong. And they learned much from their patients, and they healed many, and they grew in understanding.