

## Ten Ways To Use Illness As A Path Of Transformation

It isn't practical to set up our lives around experiencing only comfort. Yet we do because it is our natural instinct. It is only because I have had quite a bit of practice with discomfort that I don't push it away so quickly now and can see its gifts and value. But, I still grumble about it. And so I refrain from judging my grumbling and I accept discomfort as a doorway to something greater than the place I am in now. (read: the buy-in to staying in my suffering instead of so quickly doing almost anything to get out of it) This is an effective way of growing our consciousness and clearing up what ails us. But, it takes effort and attention.

Things going wrong is a wonderful construct because it is usually only when difficult things happen to us that we surrender enough to enter into transformation. It requires us to pay attention to the very issue that ails us. It asks us to be vulnerable to swim in the deep end of the pool where anxiety, fear and issues around safety, love and belonging live. I very much propose to consider focusing attention on swimming in the deep end of your life because it will create a different relationship to what ails you and that is very healing. I consider "the deep end" to be the most thorough way to heal the body and disease as well as heal our lives. ***Instead of making what ails you wrong, you can use what ails you as information to change the relationship to yourself.*** When that happens, life is less hostile. Our "problems" are the path of transformation. Autoimmune disease is a path of transformation if we choose it. The reality is that the very discomfort we are trying to cure ourselves of, is the way out and the way through.

Here is an example of this in action:

Mary has SIBO and Hashimoto's. She has been on AIP for a year and tried two SIBO protocols (both failed) and found out she has Cytomegalovirus. Emotionally she feels depressed and hopeless. Anxiety is present a lot. Her relationship to food has "always been strained". She is in her late 30's, calls herself a type A personality, and has a great job in corporate fashion. She has not had a successful relationship, however. She has deep longing to find her soulmate and have a child, and feels like her time is running out. She lives in fear of relapsing and having a Hashimoto's flare. She is worried a lot, and wonders if there is something more she should be doing health-wise. She spends a lot of her time being on high alert. To counter this, she meditates, does yoga, follows all health blogs, and works with a therapist. She comments a lot that her anxiety "keeps her locked" in a viscous cycle and the lack of food choices on AIP has both helped her feel moderately better, and makes her feel trapped. She can't figure out why she is not better, which is compounded when she reads about all the successful AIP stories she sees online. She has come to the conclusion that she does not know how to manage such a restrictive diet and be happy at the same time. She has tried reintroducing foods unsuccessfully. Her anxiety has gotten worse on AIP worrying about how to feed herself and she constantly wonders if she will ever flare again. The only things she seems to notice is that the more strict with AIP she is, the more control she feels about preventing a flare.

When we spoke, Mary told me that "I feel that life punishing me by giving me this disease" I asked her to describe what she was feeling in her body when she said that. Her chest felt tight with anxiety and her body felt unsettled. This feeling of anxiety and being unsettled is something Mary had spent her life running away from (via yoga, diet, meditation, therapy). This is totally natural to feel after all, right? When we feel anxious our body says, "Anywhere but here." I asked her if we could explore that place more. In a visualization, Mary saw herself observing her anxiety so she was not overwhelmed by it, and could instead get information about it. When she sat in the quiet place and observed her anxiety, she felt tremendous sadness. With great tenderness, she asked

herself, "Sadness, why are you here?" When she said that, immediately she felt the anxiety that said: "Life Isn't Safe."

While this is a painful moment for her to uncover, it is also important to note that by the vulnerability she showed to uncover this, she also discovered that was the lens she saw life through. This was the way she looked at everything. It was the reason why she FELT that nothing in life was safe, including her health plan. It all started to add up: failed romantic relationships, her healing plan, her tactics for reducing stress...Until she *changed the belief and the lens she saw life through*, life was going to keep giving her what she believed. So, we went about changing the lens from **Life Isn't Safe** to **Life Is Safe**. She did that by her placing her love inside herself. When she did that, she made room for a new and more useful belief. ***Unless we really get to the root of why illness is present and heal it, everything (including diet) is a temporary fix.*** The good news is that changing what we think about our lives is not complicated and most of the work is really about us choosing ourselves to be worth our own loving.

How to change what we think about our life and beliefs requires us to change the message. I suggest a straightforward approach by saying:  
*"I forgive myself for believing Life Isn't Safe"*

Once you set out with the intention of life is here to help you, I suggest becoming dedicated to stay in that place. For me, I am often called to remind myself of this many times a day. (usually "I trust this. I trust my life. Spirit, show me the way. What appears as hardship is here to help me grow loving for myself") The more I choose into this, the more I build the inner structure inside myself bit by bit, and it gets easier to operate from that place. I have some beliefs that I have been working on for years. Others clear quickly. As my life and my heart grow, they are peeled away like layers of an onion and I have learned to appreciate the unfolding of this. I do still get annoyed? Yes. Is it hard? Yes. But I keep going and trusting each speed bump life that appears in my life. Each

time I work touching my loving to the things I believe, something changes. The intimacy inside of myself expands. This is potent because one of the roles of illness, suffering and struggle is to help resolve the illusion that we are cut off from the intimacy inside of ourselves and thereby discover our wholeness. There is a wonderful vantage point to use everything as tools to accomplish this. Diet, supplements, success stories, teachers..all help. But the center of it all is you choosing you, and your own loving to do this. "I love myself enough to do this" is the center. **Then you are the healer, and the diet is your helper, not the other way around.**

So, how did Mary do? Together we looked at changing some of her core beliefs that were coloring how she saw safety in life. Instead of finding safety through AIP diet, supplements and medications, she decided to vulnerably look at the things that felt scary. Hard at first, but she noticed the more she loved herself tenderly feeling anxious and scared (which previously she harshly judged as weak and failing) she stopped searching so hard for healing. She started having a different conversation with herself which included, "Everything here that appears broken, is the way out." She stopped being her own worst critic and stopped valuing her healing by how perfect her diet was. And interestingly, she noticed that when she did that, her diet felt more manageable! She did not keep such close tabs on her SIBO bloating because when she did get bloated now, she no longer had a knee-jerk reaction that something was wrong. When she got bloated she saw it as a signal to look at the deeper wisdom. Now when she was bloated, or felt her thyroid throb she went to the tender place. "Okay thyroid. I am listening. Should we talk about how uncomfortable my anxiety is? Or how unsafe my voice was growing up in my family?" There, in that vulnerable place she stopped making SIBO and Hashimoto's something wrong and instead made them her allies of healing. She also found health practitioners that aligned with this kind of thinking when she allowed this process to unfold. Her anxiety loosened its grip and her diet became less of a struggle. She grew a kind of confidence that she has

not had before. The confidence that she could love all the pieces in her that before seemed to scary and unfixable.

### Ten Ways to See Illness as A Path of Transformation:

1. Being tender with ourselves while doing hard things is a very loving action which puts us into alignment with grace
2. Healing our life may not equal the body healed
3. Cooperating with our circumstances is very powerful
4. When we cooperation with our circumstances, we put ourselves in the center of our life, not our disease/illness
5. Loving-Kindness means we consider all the places we judge as un-fixable, to worthy of our loving
6. We focus on the relationship we have to our life as the reference point for healing (instead of what we think is wrong)
7. There is no wrong or right way to do any of this, including diet
8. Be willing to be with the places you think are failing: "Look how well you are being nervous and anxious I am today!"
9. Nothing is coming present that does not deserve our compassion and acceptance. This includes all the traits about ourselves that we have judged as "bad" like over-managing things, sadness, mistakes, anger, lack of willpower and forgetfulness...

The bottom line here is that we can rearrange the role of illness in our life to help us instead of destroy us. The power of our own loving is a healing tool we can use that only requires willingness, vulnerability and trust.