

Power of Prayer and Healing

Alfred Lord Tennyson once wrote, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Prayer is universal in its application; it's not exclusive property of any particular religion. Prayer works for everybody. My patients have taught me that.

Michael Lerner, author of the book *Choices in Healing* writes " . . . prayer, like creativity, like dedication to a life of service, is one of the great paths into the life of the spirit. Spirit is the spark of the Divine that unites all creation. Spirituality refers to the concepts, attitudes, and behavior that arise from our personal experience of spirit.

I consider myself spiritual. As such, I honor all religions. If it feels right to them, I often offer to pray with my patients in the office, before they go to surgery, or on the operating table. Prayer brings me and my patients solace, guidance, and strength. I direct my prayer to the God of their hearts. I believe that prayer – a universal form of communication with the Divine – is a vital part of the healing process.

The healing process is different from curing process. Although the two are interdependent, they're different. A cure is the complete absence of disease for the rest of a person's lifetime. A cure is what every patient wants and what every doctor hopes to bring to a patient. While a cure is not always possible, healing is. That's because healing takes place on physical, mental, and spiritual levels.

In his book *Choices in Healing*, Michael Lerner, tells the story of cancer patients that come to Commonweal Cancer Help Program. Founded in 1976, cancer patients from all over the world come to Commonweal to explore the inner meaning of their disease.

Lerner tells the story about William - a retired pediatrician with prostate cancer. William had retired so that he could provide round-the-clock care for his wife who was dying from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (commonly called Lou Gehrig's disease).

During her illness, William developed prostate cancer. During the last phase of her disease, rather than take definitive treatment for prostate cancer, he chose palliative treatment instead so that he could continue to care for his beloved wife.

After his wife died, he developed metastatic prostate cancer. He chose to attend a weeklong retreat at Commonweal to deal with the

depression he experienced after the death of his wife. He was quick to point out that he was not there to treat his prostate cancer.

Lerner asked William what brought his special joy. William reminisced about feeding the birds on his rural property in Massachusetts. Cats also brought him joy. He had a special ability to communicate with them.

Seizing upon the last point, Lerner asked William if he ever considered getting a cat as a companion. William discounted the idea since he couldn't care for the cat if he were to become sick or die.

Lerner said that his wife loved cats (especially Siamese cats) and said that they would take care of William's cat when he was no longer able to do so.

William agreed but said that he didn't want a Siamese cat. He said that he had taken care of poor, forgotten children all of his life. Therefore, he preferred to adopt an abandoned or perhaps an injured cat from the SPCA.

Several weeks later, after he got home, William called to report that he had adopted a stray cat that had been thrown from a car. The cat had sustained a number of broken bones.

William lovingly nursed the cat back to health. Every year he sent a Christmas card to his friends at Commonweal and signed it William and his cat.

Although William eventually died of prostate cancer many years later, the cat that he had befriended remained a constant source of joy for him.

While William wasn't cured of his prostate cancer, he was healed.

I pray that all of my patients can become healed.