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### ***Spirituality And Prostate Cancer***

#### ***I. Opening***

*Every year over a quarter of a million men with newly diagnosed prostate cancer embark upon an epic journey.*

*This epic journey is both an outer journey and an inner journey. The terrain of both landscapes is unfamiliar and frightening for most men. Although I'll briefly touch upon the outer journey, I'll mainly focus upon the inner journey. By the time that I've finished, you'll be able to provide your patient with a roadmap that he can use to navigate the tricky terrain of prostate cancer. (Note: This same journey applies to anyone who faces a serious challenge in their life.)*

*The inner journey is a spiritual quest, similar in many ways to the epic medieval tale about the search for the Holy Grail.*

*Like all great spiritual journeys, the spiritual journey for men with prostate cancer entails pain and suffering . . . loss and sorrow. Ultimately, after slaying dragons and overcoming great obstacles, men are rewarded with enlightenment.*

*All of the elements of a hero's journey are present. To begin with:*

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- *The Calling* is the diagnosis of prostate cancer
- *The Hero* is the patient with prostate cancer
- *The Heroine* is the female side of the man with prostate cancer. It can also apply to his female partner
- *The Quest* on the outer level, is the search for a cure. On the inner level, it's the search for a great truth.
- *There are battles to fight and challenges to overcome.* The dragon "Thou shalt" must be slain. The 'thou shalt' dragon arises from tribal rules. The tribe may be mainstream medicine, the patient's family or friends, the community, etc.
- *The Holy Grail* is enlightenment
- *Finally there is the journey home*

*When I use the term spiritual, I'm not referring to a religious journey.*

*Although related, the terms spirit, spiritual, and religion have different connotations.*

- *Spirit* is the immortal spark of the divine that is within each of us. At the core, we're all united in one spirit.
- *Spirituality* refers to our unique concepts, attitudes, and behaviors that are derived from our understanding and experience of the spirit that is within us.
- *Religion* serves social and moral purposes. It is possible to be religious and not be spiritual or vice versa.

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*Spirituality also relates to healing. Healing is different than curing. A cure is what every patient wants and what every physician hopes to deliver. A cure is the complete absence of cancer for the rest of the patient's lifetime. In contrast, healing is inner work. It occurs on the physical, mental, and spiritual level. Although the two are related, a cure is not always possible. On the other hand, healing is always possible. Today we will be talking about a healing journey for men with prostate cancer. The following story beautifully illustrates this point.*

*In his book, Choices in Healing, Michael Lerner, tells the story of cancer patients that come to Commonwealth Cancer Help Program. Founded in 1976, cancer patients from all over the world come to Commonwealth 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 referred to as 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.*

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- *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 to the staff that he was not there to treat his prostate cancer.*
- *Lerner asked William what brought his special joy. William reminisced about feeding birds on his rural property in Massachusetts. He added that cats also brought him special joy. He volunteered that he had a special ability to communicate with cats.*
- *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 explained 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 the cat".*

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- *Although William eventually died of prostate cancer many years later, the cat that he had befriended remained a constant source of joy for him.*
- *So even though William wasn't cured of his prostate cancer, he was healed.*

### *POINT OF VIEW*

*As healers, we can facilitate the healing process for our patients. We can provide them with a compass that they can use on their spiritual journey.*

### *ACTION POINT*

*Over the next hour and a half, I will discuss how you can help your patients develop a soul-survival first aid kit for prostate cancer. In the face of suffering, patients can find purpose, meaning, and hope.*

### *KEYPOINT REVIEW*

- *I. The first phase of the journey starts with the calling. Men can either accept or reject this opportunity for personal growth.*
- *II. The second phase is the spiritual journey. We'll discuss how you can assist your patients in this phase of their quest.*
- *III. The third phase of the spiritual journey for prostate cancer can be divided into two parts. The first part is referred to as the Holy Grail, or enlightenment. The second part is the journey home*

## **THE CALLING**

*The first phase of the journey is referred to as the calling.*

*The late mystic and philosopher, Joseph Campbell, often talked of the hero's journey. He had this to say about the calling:*

- *The call is an invitation to leave a certain social situation and move into your own loneliness. It is there that you will find the jewel.*
- *As judged by the world, the herald of this adventure is often dark, and terrifying; yet if one could follow the way into the darkness, that is where the jewels glow.*
- *Campbell warns that there is no security in following the call to adventure. There is no compass. There are no rules. The outcome is unknown - it can be either good or bad.*
- *The call is an invitation to enter the realm of the unconscious, the stuff that dreams are made of - the realm of the inner child. All the monsters of childhood are there - but so is the magic. The life potentials of early life that we didn't bring into adulthood are seeds that are still there, for such seeds do not die.*

### ***Refusal or Acceptance of the call***

*Men with prostate cancer have a choice: They can either refuse or accept the call.*

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*Refusal: Campbell believes that men that refuse the call become someone else's servant. A sense of life is lost. There is drying up and resignation. Anxiety builds up. He adds that what you refuse to experience in a positive way, you will experience in a negative way. Everything in you knows that an adventure has been refused.*

*Medical intuitive Carolyn Myss talks about the tribe. The tribe imposes standards on members of the tribe. Those who act outside the rules of the tribe are attacked. The tribe tries in every way possible to maintain the status quo. It takes great courage to overcome tribal peer pressure and sally forth on a quest for personal growth.*

### *Acceptance of the calling*

*Men that accept the calling embark on a journey that will change their lives. Doors will be opened where there were no doors before. Magic guides will appear to guide them. As they proceed forth on their journey, when the going gets tough and all seems lost, new guides will appear.*

### *The Hero*

*Campbell characterizes a hero as someone that has found or done something beyond the normal range of human achievement and experience. A hero is someone that has given their life to something that is bigger than themselves. Although heroes may have performed a physical deed (such as saving someone else's life), I'm referring to spiritual deeds. The hero learns to experience the supernormal range of human experience, and then come back with a message.*

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*In the popular media, heroes with prostate cancer are often famous people such as Senator Dole, Arnold Palmer or General Schwarzkopf. Our focus today is upon the hundred of thousands of unsung heroes and their loved ones that wrestle with prostate cancer every day.*

*Rachael Naomi Ramen, a pioneer of mind-body medicine and co-founder of the Commonwealth Cancer Help Program, refers to men with prostate cancer as wounded healers. Having personally faced many challenges in her life, she tells patients that her wound evokes the healer in them. And that their wound evokes the healer in her. She adds that her wound enables her to find them with their wound, where they have the illusion of having become lost.*

*We're all wounded healers. My scars came early in life. My father died of polio in the last epidemic before the Salk vaccine became widely available. My mom remarried and my stepfather sexually abused me. I married and divorced twice. Then I underwent a vision quest of my own, a spiritual journey, and returned with a gift more precious than all the gold in the world. It's called enlightenment. I now know that my dharma in this lifetime is to be a healer. I've learned to live each day, one day at a time. I also learned to bless every experience in this lifetime. I now understand that I choose these lessons to learn and grow. I know that all is in divine order.*

*Harvard professor Joan Borysenko, author of *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*, talks about the "Fall of man". She states that mankind has fallen away from its spiritual self, away from its deeper core. As a result, this*

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*begets isolation, loneliness, and unworthiness. In order to survive, people develop a false self that conforms to the norms of society in order to gain acceptance and love. But by so doing, they lose themselves in the process.*

*According to Howard Brody, MD, the meaning that the hero attaches to his experiences can either produce, or alleviate suffering.*

*As healers, we can help men with prostate cancer appreciate that their cancer is an opportunity for personal growth.*

### *The Heroine –*

*Men have a feminine side just as women have a masculine side. The two sides must be balanced though, otherwise problems can arise - illness being the one of immediate concern. During the spiritual journey men can rescue their feminine attributes. These attributes include qualities such as nurturing . . . creativity . . . heart-centeredness. . . learning how to let go of control . . . and being willing to accept help.*

*In his delightful book, *Men are From Mars, Women are from Venus*, author John Gray discusses the difference between how men and women approach challenges in their lives. Men retreat to their caves and try to solve the problem. Women, on the other hand, want to talk about the problem. They want to brainstorm and use a gestalt approach.*

*By embracing their feminine strengths, men can restore balance. (They might even learn to ask for directions when they become lost!)*

## *Preparing For The Journey*

Once men have accepted the calling, Michael Lerner suggests that men prepare for their spiritual journey by asking the following three questions:

- *The first question is this. . "If I could do (or be) absolutely anything in the world that I wanted for the rest of my life, what would I truly want to do (or be)?*

*Jung answered this question by asking himself what childhood activity made time seem to stand still. For him it was building miniature villages out of stones. He proceeded to build a stone path and cottage on his property. He then used this sacred space as a retreat.*

*When I asked myself this question, I remembered that my childhood passion was building dams of all things. I would spend countless hours planning, preparing, and building the perfect dam. Then I would watch in wonder as the trickle of water enlarged to become a placid pool of water. I'd wade in the water and skip rocks, or launch an armada of sticks and imagine make-believe battles. Finally, when it was time to go home, I would disassemble the dam and watch in awe as a powerful flood of water washed away all of the debris. Once the water had all escaped, I marveled that all of the debris was gone, and in its place was a clean streambed.*

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*As I reflect fondly upon this childhood pastime, I now see that it represents a metaphor for my life. The stream represents my stream of consciousness. The dam represents obstacles that I create. They block the smooth flow of consciousness. In effect, I create a pool of reality that I can play in. I can also remove the obstacles when I'm ready to go home. The flood of realization washes away debris that is cluttering my thinking. Jewels that lie hidden beneath the murky water can then be clearly seen.*

*The answer to this first question, "What would you like to do for the rest of your life?" proved to be lifesaving for one of my patients. In addition to urology, I see patients for alternative medicine. One patient, I'll call her Faith, came to see me for options regarding her metastatic breast cancer. She had been diagnosed and treated for breast cancer 10 years earlier. It had recurred five years later so she received a combination of radiation therapy (RT) and chemotherapy (CT). Although her cancer initially responded, several years it recurred again. This time she refused any further RT or CT.*

*As part of my work-up, I asked her the following question, "What would bring you great joy? What would you really like to do with your life?"*

*She told me that her dream was to run a bed and breakfast. She had denied herself this dream claiming that she couldn't possibly give up*

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*her job because of its health benefits . . . . even though she hated her job and was convinced that it was making her sick,*

*We devised a treatment plan that included a combination of lifestyle and dietary changes plus a variety of mind-body techniques. I also referred her to a practitioner of Traditional Chinese Medicine.*

*Over the next six months, I was impressed with her progress. The next time I saw her was a year later. When I walked into the exam room, she was beaming from ear-to-ear. She almost burst with joy when she told me that her recent CT scan had shown no evidence of her cancer. Her eyes sparkled when she added that she had quit her job and was moving to Arizona to run a bed and breakfast.*

- *The second question is this. "Since I've been diagnosed with cancer, what do I find has become important to me? And what that previously seemed important to me, do I discover that I am ready to let go?"*

*Cancer has a way of putting things in perspective. How many times have you heard a cancer patient remark that they can't believe how much time and energy they had wasted on things that didn't really matter.*

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*Cancer patients become experts at living. Whether it's real or not, they perceive that their lifeline is shortened. They don't waste time sweating the small things.*

*They also learn to say NO . . . N-O!!! , and not feel guilty about it. Time is a very precious commodity to cancer patients.*

*The third question is this: "Within the circumstances of the cancer diagnosis, what would I optimally choose in every area of my current life? What kind of mainstream and complementary therapies should I undertake? What kind of relationships? What kind of work? What forms of relaxation or meditation? What forms of exercise or recreation? What kind of diet? What rhythms of daily life? What studies or activities? What kinds of support and response do I want from family and friends? What are some of the unique things-very personal to me-that would give me special delight and healthy pleasure each day?"*

- *This last question is most important. Cancer patients are usually 'givers' that are not in touch with their own needs.*

*In her precious book, Kitchen Table Wisdom, Rachael Naomi Remen tells a wonderful story entitled "Eating The Cookie." She relates the story of a work-a-holic businessman for whom happiness meant having the cookie. The cookie for him changed everyday. One day it was money, the next day it was a new car. Or it might be the biggest*

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*contract, or the priciest house. Whatever it was, he was never satisfied.*

*His perspective changed though, when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer in his early forties. He realized that the even though he had the cookie in hand, the happiness was fleeting. He also discovered that he had to give up a lot of things in order to take care of the cookie. He learned that each day was precious, regardless of whether you had the cookie or not. In fact, he finally concluded that life itself was the cookie and he was going to eat it.*

**RECAP** *To recap, the first step on the spiritual journey is to accept the hero's calling. . . To accept the challenge to journey forth and discover ones highest potential for this lifetime.*

*Asking a series of questions about the priorities in ones life can facilitate this process of self-discovery.*

### **THE JOURNEY**

*The second phase of the spiritual quest for men with prostate cancer is the journey. There are three aspects to this journey.*

*I. The **first aspect** deals with milestones that men will encounter along the road to discovery. According to Michael Lerner, the seven milestones that men encounter include :*

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- *The Shock of diagnosis.*
- *Immediate decisions regarding conventional therapies.*
- *Subsequent decisions regarding complementary therapies.*
- *The process of going through therapy.*
- *The recovery period after therapy.*
- *The prospect of living life with the ever-present possibility of recurrence, and*
- *The development of a well-adjusted attitude.*

*The **second aspect** deals with battles that must be fought and challenges that must be overcome.*

*The **third aspect** involves hard-won lessons that must be learned (such as the healing power of love and forgiveness).*

### *The First Aspect*

*The first aspect of the journey refers to seven mileposts. In his book *Choices in Healing*, Lerner states that cancer has a life cycle. This life cycle corresponds to road markers that pilgrims with cancer must pass on their journey. As mentioned earlier, this journey is an outer journey as well as an inner journey.*

- *The first milepost is **the shock of diagnosis**. This marks the beginning of the saga. Something has been taken away. There is a loss of body image. When men are told that they have cancer, they experience an*

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*emptiness - a loss of wholeness. Their life flashes before them. Even so, it's not unusual for them to be more concerned about other things - such as their job, financial commitments, and their family – instead of their cancer. They often don't hear what the doctor is telling them. Instead, they retreat to their cave and become quiet and withdrawn. They busy themselves trying to come up with a game plan that they can use to solve the problem. The dilemma is this - cancer is uncharted territory. They're lost without a map.*

*To begin with, we can help our patients find their way by:*

- Suggesting that they bring a loved one with them to their office visit. The loved one can serve as a second set of ears. They can take notes. The patient should be listening to what the doctor is telling them*
- A tape recorder is also handy.*
- Encouraging them to ask questions. Body language is important. It's easy to tell when a patient isn't tracking along with the discussion.*
- Encouraging them to research prostate cancer. Knowledge is power. I give patients handouts or booklets that explain their options. I also offer to meet with them again, once the shock has worn off, to answer any remaining questions. When patients have a sense of control, they are less likely to become depressed. Their stress level is diminished. They respond better*

*to therapies and experience fewer treatment-related side effects.*

*The opposite is true for patients that are immobilized with fear, or ones that perceive themselves as being hopeless and helpless.*

- *The second milepost is **the immediate decision regarding conventional therapies.***

*I carefully outline the options for treating prostate cancer. Invariably patients ask me what I would do if I were in their shoes. I answer this question with another question. Having thoroughly discussed the risks and benefits of the various therapies plus the comparative chances for a cure, I ask them what is most important to them - Quality of Life or the best chance for a cure? I explain that radical surgery offers the best chance for a cure but the risk of complications (such as urinary incontinence or impotence) is greater than other options such as radiation therapy.*

*On the other hand, radiation therapy is not as effective as surgery in the long run. They have to decide what is most important to them. I reassure them that they have plenty of time to make up their minds and explore their options.*

*I add that they can get a second opinion if they still have questions or if they want another opinion. You'd be surprised at how many patients think that it's an insult to their doctor if they seek another opinion.*

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- *The third milepost is Subsequent decisions regarding complementary therapies.*

*While most physicians aren't aware that natural remedies can complement conventional cancer therapies, their patients know better. According to an article that appeared in the journal Cancer, up to sixty-four percent of patients use alternative therapies.*

*While I don't recommend alternative medicine as a definitive cure for cancer, I strongly believe that all men with prostate cancer should use complementary therapies. Why? Perhaps the words of Michael Lerner sum it up best . . . Based on ten years of painstaking research, he concluded that patients who use complementary therapies achieve a higher quality of life, respond better to most conventional cancer therapies, experience fewer side effects of treatment and fewer symptoms of disease, control pain better with less need for medication, experience more lasting or partial remissions and, if they die, experience better deaths."*

*There is also evidence that psychosocial interventions improve the quality of life of cancer patients (and may improve their survival as well).*

*Consider the following: Researchers compared the survival and quality of life among twenty-nine men with early stage prostate cancer. Men who attended at least five out of six specially designed support group*

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*meetings were compared against a matched group of sixty-five men who didn't attend these meetings.*

*Attendees at the support meetings discussed seven different topics: (1) The effect of one's beliefs, feelings and attitudes on health; (2) mental relaxation and imagery techniques; (3) nutrition and exercise; (4) stress management; (5) self-esteem and spirituality; (6) receptive imagery/intuition and problem solving, and; (7) creating a personal health plan/goal setting. The men attending the meetings were also given an audiotape on guided imagery and were encouraged to read several books on the same topic.*

*The results were astounding. The treatment group not only enjoyed a better quality of life - they lived twice as long as the control group.*

- *The fourth milepost on the path for men with prostate cancer is the **process of going through therapy.***

*I had been in practice for six years when a cancer patient of mine asked me if I had ever heard of Bernie Siegel. I had not, so she presented me with a copy of DR. Siegel's book, *Love, Medicine, and Miracles*. The book was an epiphany for me. It opened a door for me and propelled me onto the path of complementary medicine.*

*Thereafter, I began incorporating mind-body medicine into my daily practice. Soon thereafter, I also became initiated in Reiki and the Silva method and started performing absent healing on my patients.*

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*That was over 13 years ago. Everyday, I continue to expand my practice of complementary medicine. In fact, I'm just finishing a book for Penguin Putnam publishers on complementary therapies for prostate problems (including prostate cancer).*

*Healers such as Dr. Christiane Northrup, Dr. Andrew Weil, and Barbara Dossey, RN, talk about cancer therapy as a healing ritual. It's easy to understand why since cancer therapy contains all the elements of a true healing ritual. For instance, there is:*

- o Asking for help and accepting it.*
- o Leaving your regular routine, temporarily separating from friends and loved ones, and entering unknown territory with no guarantees, and*
- o Surrendering control of your body to people, places, and sources outside yourself and placing faith in something other than yourself.*

*We can help our patients during their healing ritual by sharing ways to smooth out the bumps in the road during their therapy. In this regard, Rachel Naomi Remen tells a wonderful story about the healing power of totems.*

*She relates a story about a patient that always carried a totem with her during her chemotherapy sessions. Throughout her therapy, she radiated a wonderful aura of calmness and strength. When people*

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*asked her what her secret was, she explained that her friends and loved ones had had a special ceremony for her before she started her therapy. They had gathered around her in a healing circle. They then passed a totem - a rock from Mother Earth - from one person to another. As each person held the rock in the palm of their hand, they related a story of strength, explaining how they had overcome a great obstacle in their life. Their strength was imparted to the totem. After everyone had told his or her story, the totem was passed to her. During her therapy, she drew special strength by holding onto her totem.*

- *The fifth milepost is the **recovery period after therapy.***

*After therapy, patients wake up to a new self. Their body may not be the same body that they started out with. If they lost an organ, they may have to do some grieving for a while. In addition, their postoperative body may not tolerate the lifestyle that it had before surgery. This may be a blessing if that lifestyle included unhealthy habits such as smoking, drinking too much alcohol, or even working too much. For many people, surgery is a life-changing event that marks the beginning of a whole new era.*

*Patients should also be encouraged to create a healing atmosphere for themselves following surgery. They should free themselves from as many routine activities as possible during your recovery phase. They should arrange their home environment ahead of time by compiling*

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*their favorite books, videos, and tapes. They should be willing to accept the help of others. Encourage them to think of the recovery phase as an opportunity for others to give. Learning to receive can be a precious gift of surgery.*

*Suggest to your patients that they practice gratitude and forgiveness, and take advantage of the healing power of prayer.*

*Finally, urge them to listen to their bodies. The time following surgery is tailor made for learning how to listen to their bodies. The surgical experience makes them more sensitive emotionally, physically, and spiritually than at other times. .*

- *The sixth milepost is the prospect of living life with the ever-present possibility of recurrence.*

*Patients tell me that between office visits, they live from one PSA value to another. (PSA is a blood test for prostate cancer.) During the days leading up to their office visit, they become agitated, moody, and withdrawn. I encourage them to use the 'healing imagery for the prostate' exercise that's listed in your syllabus (it's also listed on my web page under AHMA prostate cancer recommendations). Any time a negative thought crops up, they can weed fear-based thoughts from their mind by using this technique.*

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- *The final milepost on the path is the development of a well-adjusted attitude.*

*Some patients never reach this milepost. You can help them reach their destination by sharing the techniques that we're discussing today. At the right time, I also use this opportunity to explore the concept of death and dying with my patients. I share my belief that dying is just another phase of living; that there is a cycle to life just as there is a cycle to cancer. I encourage them to replace fear with faith . . . anger with acceptance . . . and depression with a sense of the divine - that spark of everlasting joy that sustains all creation.*

## **RECAP**

*In summary, the first aspect of our hero's spiritual journey is marked by seven mileposts that include:*

- *The shock of diagnosis.*
- *Immediate decisions regarding conventional therapies.*
- *Subsequent decisions regarding complementary therapies.*
- *The process of going through therapy.*
- *The recovery period after therapy.*
- *The prospect of living life with the ever-present possibility of recurrence.*
- *And the development of a well-adjusted attitude.*

## *The Second Aspect*

*The second aspect of the spiritual journey involves battles that have to be fought and challenges that have to be overcome.*

*According to Joseph Campbell, the hero's journey is about death and resurrection: Death of the old ways and resurrection of new ones.*

*There is always danger at the threshold. The path ahead appears forbidding. There is no compass to guide you. There are no maps. No roads. The path for each person is unique. If you follow another person's path, you will become confused . . . Lost. The inner spiritual quest is a solitary journey. Even so, guides will appear to lead the way. The closer you get to the Grail Castle or enlightenment, the stiffer is the resistance. Just when it seems that you can't muster another ounce of strength, more guides appear.*

*In the delightful book, *A Joseph Campbell Companion*, he talks about the 'Thou Shalt Dragon.' This dragon must be slain in order to reach the Holy Grail. The scales that protect this dragon are made of rules that are imposed upon us by the Tribe.*

*According to Carolyn Myss, the tribe can be doctors, family, friends, or the community at large.*

*Pilgrims that stray from the accepted path encounter ferocious dragons that huff and puff. One such dragon is born when a 'medical hex' is cast upon a patient for refusing to conform to the accepted way of thinking. Doctors*

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*often warn patients that they will suffer dire consequences if they oppose the wisdom of the tribe.*

*Cancer survivors are patients that have learned to slay the 'thou shalt dragon.' Cancer survivors are patients that:*

- Don't take 'no' for an answer*
- Actively search for help*
- Seek out others who have been healed from their type of cancer*
- Form constructive partnerships with health professionals*
- Don't hesitate to make radical life changes*
- Regard illness as a gift, as a turning point in their lives*
- Find a purpose in life*
- Cultivate self-acceptance*
- Avoid constant thoughts about undesirable developments*
- Cultivate a balanced optimism.*

*Let's briefly examine each of these characteristics.*

***They don't take 'no' for an answer.***

*Unfortunately, when doctors come to the bottom of their bag of tricks, patients are often told that nothing else can be done. Although I'm not in favor dispensing false hope, I also realize the limitations of our knowledge. According to Elliott Dascher, author of the book *Whole Healing*, "much like their patients, doctors have learned only one approach to disease. If it*

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*doesn't work, they're stuck. All of our knowledge, however accurate it may seem, is partial and always subject to revision. Doctors that don't have an open mind are prisoners of a borrowed set of values and beliefs."*

*Cancer doesn't occur overnight, it's a dynamic process; it's constantly evolving and potentially reversible. Cancer cells originate from normal cells that have been altered because of dietary, lifestyle, genetic, and environmental influences. Since cancer cells (like normal cells) continually adapt to changes in their local environment, it may be possible to slow down or even reverse cancer by altering these risk factors. In my book, I outline how men with prostate cancer can do this.*

### *They Actively search for help*

*I encourage my patients to take an active role in their care. I've found that they're extremely motivated. After all, their lives are on the line. When patients bring in a pile of research material, I'm encouraged. It's a good sign. Furthermore, I learn a great deal from my patients. As healers, we can help them sort the wheat from the chaff.*

### *They seek out others who have been healed from their type of cancer*

*Stories of cancer survivors give hope and inspiration to patients. I routinely hook patients up with other cancer survivors.*

### *They form constructive partnerships with health professionals*

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*According to Leo Galland, author of the book *Power Healing*, patients should seek doctors that are:*

- ***willing to listen.** Studies have shown that within the first 18 seconds of an interview, physicians start interrupting their patients. Practice carefully listening to your patients.*
- ***willing to acknowledge.** An analysis of taped transcripts of visits to a medical clinic found that patients attempt to clarify or challenge what a doctor has said 85% of the time. Unfortunately, their requests are usually ignored or interrupted. Caring doctors ask their patients, "what do you think has caused your problem?" (They also listen to the answer.)*
- ***willing to explain.** Doctors spend 45% of the time giving information and only 5% of the time explaining. Take time to explain things to your patients.*
- ***willing to assess family and social support.** Studies have shown that patients with a strong support network tolerate therapies better, experience a better quality of life, and live longer.*
- ***willing to show empathy.** Although it doesn't require a tragedy in ones life to become empathetic, you can always tell if a doctor has walked in the same shoes as their patients. Remember, you can always be empathetic, even if you can't solve your patient's problem.*
- ***willing to offer encouragement, hope, and reassurance.***

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*Michael Lerner discusses the difference between the perspective of scientists, doctors, and cancer patients. **Scientists** are purveyors of doubt. Their healthy process of doubt leads them to check and recheck everything. They have nothing to lose and everything to gain, since they live in a research culture that emphasizes the primacy of doubt.*

*In contrast, although **Doctors** that treat cancer are also scientists, they are more willing to employ treatments that are based on incomplete and inconclusive data as long as it has a scientific basis.*

***Cancer patients**, on the other hand, have a much different perspective. Their time line is shorter. Consequently, they are interested in any treatment that offers some hope during the time of their particular disease. Hope is the key word. If patients are without hope, they won't try to save themselves.*

*According to Jimmie Holland, a psychooncologist at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, in the face of a life-threatening cancer, patients operate on two tracks. At one level, they are aware of the statistics that the scientist-physician has given them. If the prognosis is grim, they are aware of the fact that the chances for survival are slim. On the other track, they continue to hope that they will be the exception to the rule; that they will be the ones that survive.*

***They don't hesitate to make radical life changes***

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*Lifestyle –how we live– can either increase or decrease the risk of prostate cancer. Even so, despite the fact that a healthy lifestyle decreases the risk of prostate cancer, few patients are willing to make the sweeping changes that are needed to 'beat' prostate cancer.*

*In the words of Leo Galland, "The greatest challenge and the greatest promise in medicine today is not cost control, genetic engineering, or the development of new technologies . . . it is learning how to motivate people to change their behavior."*

*For cancer survivors, everything is on the table. They are willing to make radical life changes.*

### *Regard illness as a gift, as a turning point in their lives*

*Larry LeShan's book *Cancer As A Turning Point*, talks about the transformative power of cancer. If you wander through any book store, you'll notice that the best selling books about cancer are stories that are written by cancer survivors. The heroes of these stories have discovered the secret that cancer was a turning point in their lives.*

### *Find a purpose in life*

*In her book *Why People Don't Heal, And How They Can*, Carolyn Myss talks about the healing power of finding a purpose in life. Cancer is a wound she says. This wound sucks energy from the body. Substituting positive*

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*energy (that is, a purpose in life) for negative cancer energy short-circuits the loss of the body's vital force.*

*Myss explains that the prostate is located in the second or sacral chakra. (There are seven chakras or energy centers in the body.)*

*While the sacral chakra is traditionally associated with sexual energy, other energies may be involved. For instance, according to Myss, the sacral chakra is also a storehouse for energies that involve money, aggression, guilt, sexual abuse, betrayal, greed, hostility, vengeance and physical violence.*

*She recommends refocusing one's energies (that is, one's thoughts, speech and physical actions) away from the sacral chakra; focusing them instead upon higher energies - healing energies - such as love, truth, faith, hope, courage, and spirituality.*

*Michael Milken is a good example. As you may remember, he was a junk bond wizard who was jailed for securities violations. Later he developed metastatic prostate cancer. After much soul searching, he discovered that his prostate cancer was a blessing in disguise. He found a purpose in life. He is now committing his energy and resources to cancer research and education.*

### *Cultivate self-acceptance*

*Cancer survivors learn to accept themselves as they are. They can look themselves in the mirror and say, "I love you!" (and really mean it).*

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### *Avoid constant thoughts about undesirable developments*

*What we think and say influences the health and healing of every cell in our bodies. The spoken word embodies sound energy. It bridges the inner subjective and the outer objective world. It makes manifest our inner thoughts. Our thoughts are an inner dialogue we have with ourselves. They form the dominant energies we communicate to our bodies. As such, our speech and thoughts have a potent effect upon mind and matter. The healing, or destructive, power of the mind (speech and thoughts) upon the body, profoundly influences the quality of life and survival of men with prostate cancer.*

*The following story illustrates this point. Rachel Naomi Remen tells the story of a patient that had an intractable case of lupus. She had tried every trick in the book to make this patient better. Although the patient initially responded to treatment, she would always relapse. The reason became clear one day when Dr. Remen saw the patient getting into her car after one of her appointments. Her license plate spelled L-U-P-U-S. (LUPUS). She couldn't let go of her illness. Her illness was her identity.*

*We've all know patients that love to "tell the story." Every time that you encounter them, they complain how unjust life is. They've fallen into a hole. More often than not, they're not aware of it either.*

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*I love to share the following poem with patients that are stuck in a rut.  
Written by Portia Nelson, the poem is entitled My Life In Five Chapters. It  
goes like this:*

*I*

*I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk, I fall in  
I am lost... I am helpless  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes forever to find a way out.*

*II*

*I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk,  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe that I am in the same place.  
But it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.*

*III*

*I walk down the same street  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk,  
I see it there.  
I still fall in.... It's a habit.*

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*My eyes are wide open.*

*I know where I am.*

*It is my fault.*

*I get out immediately.*

*IV*

*I walk down the same street.*

*There is a deep hole in the sidewalk,*

*I walk around it*

*V*

*I walk down another street.*

*(Cancer survivors walk down another street.)*

### ***Cultivate a balanced optimism.***

*As Bernie Siegel puts it, "In the absence of certainty, there is nothing wrong with hope." Cancer patients cultivate a balanced hope.*

### ***The Third Aspect***

*The third aspect of the journey involves **hard-won lessons that must be learned. These include the healing power of forgiveness, and the healing alchemy of love.***

*According to Joseph Campbell, it's by going into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life. He says that where you stumble, there lies your treasure.*

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*The very cave that you were afraid to enter turns out to be the source of what you were looking for.*

*Of all the lessons I've learned over the years, perhaps the most valuable lesson is the healing power of forgiveness. I've come to understand that forgiveness is a gift we give ourselves. It sets us free.*

- ***Start with yourself.** Tell yourself that you love and appreciate yourself. Learn to mean it. Accept yourself as you are. Learn to laugh at yourself and with others. Come to terms with your strengths, and your weaknesses. Appreciate your uniqueness.*
- ***Forgive others.** Once you've forgiven yourself, rectify any existing relationship problems. Release any grudges. It takes a lot of energy to hold a grudge. Releasing a grudge frees energy for better things. Healthier things.*
- ***Love others.** Tell people you love that you love them. Take time to really listen to people. Careful listening is an expression of love.*

*I've observed that patients who learn to forgive and love themselves and others are happier and healthier people. It's never too late (or too soon) to start. So why not start today?*

*My best friend tells me that she loves pulling weeds. (I hate to pull weeds.) She tells me that while she weeds, she imagines that she is weeding all of the undesirable things from her life. In their place, she plants a garden of love*

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*and forgiveness. She shared with me a poem called "A Garden For Daily Living". It goes like this:*

*Plant three rows of peas:*

*Peace of mind*

*Peace of Heart*

*Peace of soul.*

*Plant four rows of squash:*

*Squash gossip*

*Squash indifference*

*Squash grumbling*

*Squash selfishness.*

*Plant four rows of lettuce:*

*Lettuce be faithful*

*Lettuce be kind*

*Lettuce be Happy*

*Lettuce Love one another.*

*No garden should be without turnips:*

*Turnip for service when needed*

*Turnip to help one another*

*Turnip the music and dance*

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*Water freely with patience and*

*Cultivate with love.*

*There is much fruit in your garden*

*Because you reap what you sow.*

*To conclude our garden We must have thyme:*

*Thyme for fun*

*Thyme for rest*

*Thyme for ourselves.*

*Upon reflection, I must admit that I can now see the value of pulling weeds.*

*When I shared my revelation with my friend, she told me not to worry, she knew where I could find plenty of weeds to pull.*

*We should encourage our cancer patients to plant a garden for daily living (and practice pulling weeds).*

### *The healing alchemy of Love*

*Love, hope, and beauty nourish our immune system and promote healing.*

*Hate, anger, and despair has the opposite effect.*

*A prostate cancer patient of mine is one of my heroes. I'll call him Sunny.*

*When I first met Sunny he was working 24/7 for IBM. When he was diagnosed with a particularly aggressive form of prostate cancer, it had already metastasized. He couldn't conceive of life without IBM. Since that time, he has traveled to distant lands and has slain an army of dragons along*

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*the way. After retiring from IBM, he learned that there is a life after IBM. He is now living life one day at a time, living each day to its fullest. He knew that I was preparing for this conference and sent me the following e-mail that I would like to share with you. It's entitled Installing Love. The following is a dialogue between a customer service rep and a customer. It goes like this:*

***Customer Service Rep:*** *Can you install LOVE?*

***Customer:*** *I can do that. I'm not very technical, but I think I am ready to install now. What do I do first?*

***CS Rep:*** *The first step is to open your HEART. Have you located your HEART, sir?*

***Customer:*** *Yes I have, but there are several programs running right now. Is it okay to install while they are running?*

***CS Rep:*** *What programs are running sir?*

***Customer:*** *Let me see....I have*

- *PASTHURT .EXE,*
- *LOWESTEEM .EXE,*
- *GRUDGE. .EXE,*
- *and RESENTMENT .COM running right now.*

***CS Rep:*** *No problem.*

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*LOVE will automatically erase PAST HURT .EXE from your current operating system. It may remain in your permanent memory, but it will no longer disrupt other programs.*

*LOVE will eventually overwrite LOW ESTEEM .EXE with a module of its own called HIGH ESTEEM .EXE.*

*However, you have to completely turn off GRUDGE. .EXE and RESENTMENT.COM. Those programs prevent LOVE from being properly installed. Can you turn those off sir?*

*Customer: I don't know how to turn them off. Can you tell me how?*

*CS Rep: My pleasure. Go to your Start menu and invoke FORGIVENESS .EXE. Do this as many times as necessary until GRUDGE. .EXE and RESENTMENT.COM have been completely erased.*

*Customer: Okay, I'm done. LOVE has started installing itself automatically. Is that normal?*

*CS Rep: Yes it is. You should receive a message that says it will reinstall for the life of your HEART. Do you see that message?*

*Customer: Yes I do. Is it completely installed?*

*CS Rep: Yes, but remember that you have only the base program. You need to begin connecting to other HEARTS in order to get the upgrades.*

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*Customer:* Oooops...I have an error message already. What should I do?

*CS Rep:* What does the message say?

*Customer:* It says "ERROR 412 - PROGRAM NOT RUN ON INTERNAL COMPONENTS". What does that mean?

*CS Rep:* Don't worry sir, that's a common problem. It means that the LOVE program is set up to run on external HEARTS but has not yet been run on your HEART. It is one of those complicated programming things, but in non-technical terms it means you have to "LOVE" your own machine before it can "LOVE" others.

*Customer:* So what should I do?

*CS Rep:* Can you find the directory called "SELF-ACCEPTANCE"?

*Customer:* Yes, I have it.

*CS Rep:* Excellent, you are getting good at this.

*Customer:* Thank you.

*CS Rep:* You're welcome. Click on the following files and then copy them to the "MYHEART" directory:

- FORGIVE SELF.DOC,
- SELFESTEEM.TXT,
- REALIZEWORTH.TXT,

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- *and GOODNESS .DOC.*

*The system will overwrite any conflicting files and begin patching any faulty programming. Also, you need to delete SELF CRITIC .EXE from all directories, and then empty your recycle bin afterwards to make sure it is completely gone and never comes back.*

*Customer: Got it. Hey! My HEART is filling up with really neat files. SMILE. MPG is playing on my monitor right now and it shows that WARMTH .COM,, PEACE. .EXE, and CONTENTMENT .COM are copying themselves all over my HEART!*

*CS Rep: Then LOVE is installed and running. You should be able to handle it from here. One more thing before I go...*

*Customer: Yes?*

*CS Rep: LOVE is freeware. Be sure to give it and its various modules to everybody you meet. They will in turn share it with other people and they will return some really neat modules back to you.*

*Customer: I will. Thank you for your help.*

*We should encourage all of our patients to install love in their central computers.*

**RECAP**

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*To recap:*

*The first phase of the spiritual journey for prostate cancer is to accept the calling.*

*The second phase is called the journey. The three aspects of the journey that we have covered include:*

- 1. the seven mileposts that men with prostate cancer encounter on their pilgrimage to enlightenment;*
- 2. the 'thou shalt dragon' that must be slain, and the challenges that must be overcome;*
- 3. and finally, the lessons that must be learned, especially the lessons of love and forgiveness.*

### *THE THIRD PHASE OF THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY*

*The third phase of the spiritual journey for men with prostate cancer can be divided into two parts. The first part is referred to as the Holy Grail, or enlightenment. The second part is the journey home.*

### *THE HOLY GRAIL*

*Men with prostate cancer face the certainty of illness, the probability of pain and suffering, and the possibility of death. Those who chose to journey inward are often transformed by their illness.*

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*According to Victor Frankel, author of the book, Man's Search For Meaning, we can't choose what life gives us, but we can choose how we respond to it. Frankel suffered untold atrocities while interned in a Nazi concentration camp. He was transformed by this experience. He was able to stand outside the experience and see the hidden message.*

*This is what I meant when I said that cancer survivors often see cancer as a blessing - as a turning point in their lives.*

*According to Joseph Campbell, the Grail is the knowledge that the realm of the two worlds – the outer physical world and the inner unconscious spiritual world – is one in the same. They have always been there.*

*The Indian term for illusion is **mayā**. Once men have reached the Grail, their blindfolds are removed. They can see that the trivial things that had seemed so important before they began their quest are no longer important. They're able to see that these things were merely mayā. They come to an understanding that their physical body is temporal. Once they realize that the spirit is eternal, a feeling of grace overcomes them. They are no longer afraid to die . . . or to live.*

*Stories abound of near death experiences. The fundamental elements are the same. Survivors describe a journey through a tunnel of light. On the other side, loved ones, angels, and a supreme being are waiting for them with open arms. As part of their debriefing, they are given a choice of staying or returning to the physical world.*

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*If they choose to return, they bring with them an incredible tolerance, compassion, and love for their fellow travelers on the path. They know that this life is only a dream. They don't sweat the small things. Cancer patients who reach the Grail Castle are rewarded with this same insight.*

*The final illumination comes with totally letting go. According to Joe Campbell, success is following one's bliss - having the courage to let go of the past and all its attachments and opening up to our highest potential. Like Victor Frankel, Campbell says that the world will always have sorrows. We can't cure them, but we can chose to participate joyfully in the sorrows of the world. Those who have captured the Grail can stand outside of the drama and see the greater plan. They know that all is in divine order. They know that the Lord works in mysterious ways.*

*For Buddha the journey's end came with nirvana or enlightenment; for Christ it was becoming one with God; for the hero, the journey's end comes when he realizes that the privilege of life is being who you are.*

### **THE JOURNEY HOME**

*The final phase of the spiritual journey is the return home: Bringing back the message of enlightenment to every aspect of your life. There are dangers that accompany enlightenment. Men that have undergone a spiritual awakening often find that the tribe doesn't want to hear their message. Returning heroes must make a choice.*

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- *They can go back to the Grail Castle and forsake the tribe altogether.*
- *They can relinquish the precious jewels that they have uncovered, conform to tribal rules, and return to their old ways,*
- *They can leave the tribe and find a new tribe*
- *Or they can selectively share their insights with those that are ready to hear their pearls of wisdom.*

*In order to live a contented life, enlightened cancer patients must be true to themselves first. They understand that eternity is a dimension of the here and now. If we fail to learn the lessons of this lifetime, we are doomed to face them again until we learn the lesson.*

*We can help our cancer patients on their spiritual journey by being open minded. As Albert Einstein puts it,*

*"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking that created them in the first place."*

*As healers, we can enrich our lives and that of our patients by helping them explore the spiritual dimension of healing.*

## **RECAP**

*To recap, we've learned that the first phase of a spiritual quest is the calling, the second phase is the journey, and the third phase is enlightenment.*

## **PATIENT STORIES**

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*Before I close, I'd like to briefly share with you the stories of six of my patients with prostate cancer. These patients are at various stages in their spiritual journey. Some have achieved enlightenment, others are still searching, one has refused the call.*

*These patients typify the traits of **denial, depression, joy, hope, peace, and courage.***

### **DENIAL**

*The first patient had a PSA over a hundred when he was referred to me. (A normal PSA is less than four.) He never showed up for his appointment. Since he lived alone and didn't have any family, I took the unusual step of calling the police to go to his home. I was afraid that he might have committed suicide. He hadn't, but he was in a drunken stupor. He also refused to be seen.*

*Two years later, he wandered into my office in urinary retention. After he reminded me of whom he was, I inserted a drainage catheter and performed an aspiration biopsy of his prostate. (I was afraid that he wouldn't show up again.) He assured me that he had finally reached bottom, and was now ready to cooperate. Therefore, I arranged for further studies. As expected, these studies showed that he had metastatic disease. Nevertheless, four years have passed since I first started him on hormonal therapy. His cancer is still in remission; he has learned to smile; and he has even stopped drinking.*

## **DEPRESSION**

*The second patient had surgery for presumed localized prostate cancer. Unfortunately, the cancer had spread to his lymph nodes, so I didn't remove his prostate. Instead, I treated him with hormonal therapy. He was doing fine until he went to his first and only prostate cancer support group meeting. The lecturer that evening was a local urologist. The topic of discussion was metastatic prostate cancer. During his lecture, the urologist stated that the mean survival for men with metastatic prostate cancer was eighteen months. My patient didn't hear anything else that the urologist had to say that evening because he snuck out of the lecture hall.*

*The next time I saw him in the office, he was a basket case. He was convinced that death was imminent. I explained that statistics are based on a bell shaped curve. I pointed out that his situation was not the typical case of metastatic prostate cancer. He had a low Gleason score (a measure of tumor aggressiveness) and only a tiny number of cancer cells had escaped from his prostate. Patients in his category were on the favorable end of the bell shaped curve. In fact, I told him that a number of men with minimal disease (the kind that he had) live ten years and beyond after starting hormone therapy.*

*That was almost ten years ago. He is still cancer free, yet he has that same empty look on his face that he had when he told me that he had only 18 months to live. He has refused to call for a spiritual journey.*

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### *JOY*

*Unfortunately, the only picture that I have of the next patient is the one that is framed in my heart. He developed a nasty prostate tumor that spread quickly. He continued to go downhill despite my best efforts.*

*Every time I'd walk into the exam room to visit with him, the room was aglow with joy. The ritual was always the same. We'd hug one another and then he'd ask me how I was holding up! Then we'd chat for a while. When I finally got around to asking about him, he told me how much fun he was having. He taught an adult Sunday school class. He'd share healing stories with me. I knew then that he had reached the Grail Castle and was sharing hard-won lessons with his flock.*

*He died peacefully several years ago after a two-year battle with prostate cancer. When I close my eyes, I can still see his beaming smile and feel his love and joy wash over me.*

### *HOPE*

*I had followed the next patient for many years before he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He told me that he knew that I would do the best that I could, but that the real healing job came from a higher source. He was sure as the day is long that he was going to be cured. Initially he chose watchful waiting, that is, no treatment for his cancer. However, once his PSA started to climb, he agreed to be treated.*

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*I treated him with brachytherapy, a new treatment for prostate cancer that uses radioactive seeds. The day of the procedure, he took me aside and told me again not to worry, we were in good hands. As far as he was concerned, he was already cured.*

### **PEACE**

*The next patient was scared to death to have surgery, and yet surgery offered him the best chance for a cure. He had had a terrifying experience some years ago during a routine operation. Although everything went well, he was still haunted by a suffocating sensation every time he flashed back on that experience.*

*We explored other options and I asked him if he would allow me to mentally guide him through the steps before, during, and after surgery. He agreed. He and his wife, Cheri Elliott (the magnificent nurse that I am privileged to work with), and I met in an exam room we affectionately call the 'healing room'.*

*We played soft music, turned down the lights, and meditated for a while. Then I led him through every step of the procedure from start to finish. Later, he sailed through the surgery without a hitch.*

*After surgery, he was a changed man. He was totally at peace with his place in the universe. He later shared with me that he ready to die when his time*

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*came. With a tinkle in his eye, though, he also told me that he was going to boogie in the meantime.*

### *Courage*

*The last patient is my hero. He started out with a loaded deck. Although I had removed his prostate, it turned out that his cancer had already spread to bone. He accepted the hero's call and started his spiritual journey four years ago. Since then, he has completed the journey and has brought back a treasure chest of jewels. Rather than keep these nuggets of wisdom for himself though, he has shared them with his fellow travelers on the path. He oversees a prostate cancer support group, and lobbies Congress for money to fund prostate cancer research. I might add that he is also a good friend.*

*His motto is this . . . "Know your enemy, know yourself, there is no war you cannot win." His courageous fight against prostate cancer is awe-inspiring. And yet, he is at peace. He is the archetypical hero that legends are made of.*

### *CLOSING*

*In closing, I'd like to share a poem that was written by someone that has completed all three phases of the spiritual journey. A disabled war veteran wrote this uplifting poem. His crippling war injury proved to be a turning point in his life. He wrote:*

*I asked God for strength, that I might achieve,  
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.*

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*I asked for health, that I might do great things,  
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.*

*I asked for riches, that I might be happy,  
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.*

*I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men,  
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.  
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life, I was given life, that I might  
enjoy all things.*

*I got nothing that I asked for – but everything I had hoped for.*

*Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.*

*I am, among all men, most richly blessed.*