

Mind Over Matter

*Age is an issue of mind over matter.
If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.*

Mark Twain

You may already know that in early April this year, Gloria was admitted to Wythenshawe Hospital with some kind of heart problem that doctors treated as an emergency. The crisis was soon over and Gloria came home feeling not too bad all things considered. However, since then, she has been having some angina attacks. My response to all of this has been to keep telling her to 'take it easy!' as well as buying much more fruit and veg. than usual, including expensive little bottles of pure pomegranate juice.

Why the juice? Because I read a report online that *one* man had cleared his clogged arteries by drinking pomegranate juice every day for a year. I do know that is an anecdote and not scientific evidence, but I just wanted to do something to alleviate my own anxiety about Gloria's health. Then the other day, Gloria told me that she was determined not to define herself as being someone living with heart disease. She was totally committed to seeing herself as healthy and as fully able to do anything she chose to do in the future such as running a Tai Chi and Mindfulness retreat with our lovely friend Jacky Seery in Spain next July.

Gloria's incredibly upbeat 'can do' attitude got me thinking about how we all respond differently to physical, emotional or mental problems in our lives. Her inner strength in the face of adversity also reminded me of how choosing to respond to any personal difficulty or health condition with courage, love and trust in the universe can make a huge difference to our day to day well-being.

I would also like to suggest here that choosing love over fear, and 'can do' rather than 'I had better not!' is especially important as we age. I am afraid it is simply a fact of life that if we live into our 70s, 80s or 90s, we are going to reach the point at which some physical weaknesses are inevitable. So we need to learn how to adjust our lives to suit our ageing body, without letting our ageing body define or limit us. We need to know how to age gracefully, whilst still sometimes acting as if we were as old as our shoe size rather than our chronological age.

Let's keep this simple and say that there are two key ways to respond to any physical, emotional or mental difficulties that come our way in life. One response is to begin to let a particular difficulty define us and narrow our horizons big time. For example, we used to know a truly lovely woman who had a food allergy that was not in any way life threatening. But for some reason, this friend of ours became so fearfully obsessed about her allergy that eating out anywhere seemed to become more and more of a nightmare for her. Her obsessive fear of reacting badly to certain foods thus began to shrink her horizons in a quite significant way.

Now contrast that story with the story of another close friend of ours who has had progressive Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for a number of years. This friend now has some really serious mobility issues and even falls quite frequently, and yet she absolutely does not let this truly debilitating and nasty illness define her or her life. She goes on spiritual retreats all around the world and leads a really full, meaningful and helpful life despite her quite severe disabilities.

Now, if you are no longer a spring chicken, it is even more important that you do not let any issues in your ageing body stand in the way of leading a fulfilling or even an adventurous life. There is now so much scientific evidence that older people who stay active, learn new skills, or volunteer to help others on a regular basis are much more physically, mentally and emotionally healthy than retirees who sit around doing very little day in and day out. As that old adage goes: Use it or lose it!

Master Jason Chan always encouraged us all to live to the max day in and day out even if doing so involved taking the odd risk or two. He used to say to us, 'What on earth is the point of living a risk-free life just so that you can arrive safely at your own grave?' When I first heard him say that, I thought it sounded pretty weird, but now I am older, I can really appreciate the wisdom in his rather odd sounding advice. At my age, some friends are beginning to say to me stuff like, 'Are you sure you should still be flying at your age, especially as flying is really stressful these days? My response is always, 'I don't care how stressful and tiring flying is if it still enables me to broaden my horizons and raise my energy up to a radiant level!'

So the basic message this month is: Do not do anything to shrink your world because you are giving priority to staying physically or emotionally safe. If you do this, you are letting fear triumph over love. Do what makes your heart sing, even if that puts a strain on your heart or any other part of your ageing body. Our incredibly short stay on Planet Earth should be an exciting adventure from start to finish. So please keep living as adventurously as you possibly can regardless of any health worries you may now have.

I do have one final caveat to add here however. In between all the wonderful adventures you are going to embark on this year and next, please, please take plenty of time to pause and simply *be* for a while. In our hyperactive modern world, even great-grandparents can sometimes be seen running around frantically like headless chickens wearing themselves out in order to help or to please the younger members of their families. Don't do this! Once we reach a certain age, I believe we have earned the right to let go of some of our earlier responsibilities in life to find time for our own fulfilment and spiritual advancement.

In India, once men reached their 60s, it used to be widely accepted that they could leave their family responsibilities behind and wander off into the mountains in search of spiritual enlightenment. Thankfully, there is now no need for us to leave the comfort of our living rooms to seek some kind of deep inner meaning to life. All we have to do these days is search on YouTube for guided meditations that will take us on a wonderfully adventurous *inner* journey that is even more crucial to our well-being than any outward adventurous journeys we may bravely embark on this year.

By the way two of my favourite spiritual teachers who have a number of guided meditations on YouTube are Ram Dass and Bruce Davis. But please have a search for yourself, find a short guided meditation that you really enjoy, and do it once a day for a while. I think you will be surprised how alive this will make you feel - whatever your age.

Peggy Foster
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