

My Body's Prayer

Rhonda Ashurst

Please be kind, gentle and compassionate with me and with yourself. Please nurture me with healthy food and moderate exercise, leisurely walks in nature, fragrant baths, loving hugs, gentle stretches, comfortable clothing, good sleep, rest, dancing, smiling, laughing, loving, playing, and rolling on the floor with your dog. Please restrain my excessive appetites. Please accept my decline with age, allowing the vigorous activities of youth to soften and mellow. Please love, honor and care for me when I have wrinkles, grey hair, moles, varicose veins, more body fat, less strength and when I suffer from chronic pain and illness. And, when I can no longer carry you in the world, I pray that you will have the courage and faith to lovingly release yourself from me. May we both look back on this life and know we have served each other well.

My body is one of my greatest spiritual teachers, helping me to learn balance, humility, patience, discipline, vulnerability, open-heartedness, compassion, and loving-kindness. My body prays to me through illness and accidents. When I've gone beyond my limits, I end up in bed with a nasty cold or flu. In the last twelve years, my body has used my left hand or arm to get my attention.

In 1996, I moved to Colorado to take a job in a rural mental health center. One week I worked ninety hours to stabilize a client in the hospital. After getting home late at night, I was stumbling around in my trailer, looking for something to eat. I found a potato, but couldn't find a clean cutting board. I grabbed a knife and had the idea that I could just cut it open in my hand and pop it in the microwave. This was not a logical thought, but the kind of thought generated by a brain that has not had enough rest.

I ended up pushing the knife through the potato and into my left, middle finger. It was a small cut just below the knuckle on the ring finger side. I severed a tendon, nerve and artery. A hand surgeon labored for over two hours to reconstruct my finger. For a month I was in a cast and was not allowed to use the hand at all so I wouldn't tear the delicate stitching inside my finger. During this time, I could not dress myself, drive my car, wash my hair, go shopping, prepare a meal, or wash dishes. I was suddenly helpless in a new community where I knew few people.

I learned the great spiritual lesson of how to ask for and receive help: "Would you wash my hair? Could you help me get out of these pants?" It is incredibly humbling to suddenly not be able to do these things for yourself. And I was met by a generosity that stunned me. A woman I'd only met once at a business lunch invited me to come and live with her. She did it with warmhearted compassion and showed me it was safe to receive, to be cared for.

It was a gift that opened my heart. I realized I had been independent to a fault, determined not to need any help and to take care of everyone else, often times at my own expense. That is what good Christians do, isn't it?

Shortly after my hand injury, I met my soul mate. I don't think I would have allowed him into my heart had it not been opened by this experience of helplessness. Recently he has fallen ill. An old part of me has risen up to take on many of the tasks we once shared. I have driven myself mercilessly again, and the tendons in my left arm have been praying to me.

I have developed such a serious case of tendonitis, that I can barely use my left arm and hand. I must ask for help again. I must honor that I cannot fix everything by over-functioning. It seems an easy place to go, so much easier than admitting what I can't do, asking for help, receiving help. Why is that so hard?

Why must my left hand/arm be debilitated in order to get my attention? In energy medicine, it is believed that the left side of the body receives energy and the right gives it. My energy blockage is in receiving, so that is where my body reminds me of my own needs. I realize I like giving and helping more than receiving, because I feel more powerful when giving. I don't like feeling vulnerable, which is part of asking for and receiving help.

In considering the care of the body, I often think of Christ's injunction to "Love thy neighbor as thyself." When I'm abusing myself, my precious body, then how do I treat others? How do others feel when they know I am hurting myself to help them? Is it really selfish to put one's own care first, and then to give out of an overflowing bucket? Wouldn't that be more loving?

***Rhonda Ashurst** is a life coach in Alamosa, Colorado. She is a spiritual universalist and feels closest to God when in nature.*