

Group Support as a Path to Health

I think anyone reading these articles would agree that we are in difficult times. From the beginning it has been my intention to write about health issues that have maximum benefit at minimum cost. One way to achieve this is through support groups. According to University of Massachusetts professor, Jon Kabat Zinn, group support can reduce stress, eliminate negative thinking, improve coping skills for life threatening diseases, and even improve recovery and survival rates. Group meetings are available for dozens of life struggles including cancer, weight loss, addictions, anxieties, gambling and financial problems.

In my recent experience I spoke at the Woman's Cancer Support Group in Lakeport. I was inspired by the love and camaraderie of all the participants. If you are a woman struggling with any type of cancer, this group is for you. Every attendee is heard understood and acknowledged. This was a powerful healing environment. There are tears and laughter as these women speak about their challenges, frustrations, as well as their courage, bravery and victories. For more information about this group please call, 263-5728.

Another excellent example of the healing impact of a group is Alcoholics Anonymous. In my view, AA represents power over force. Applying force to the recovery of an alcoholic results in failure of the treatment. For instance, you can take away an alcoholic's car, driver's license, home, job, family, and all of their money, but you would accomplish nothing. All of this represents force and it is futile as a way to recovery. No amount of force will lead to sobriety.

However, when an alcoholic goes to an AA meeting, they get a jolt of something different. That something is unconditional love. Unconditional love has a power all of its own. The group of people in an AA meeting hold this power and a new member is overcome by the mere presence of their non-judgmental acceptance. Like gravity, the power is equal and available to everyone who is present.

To illustrate non-judgmental acceptance consider this humorous example. A person could have just got out of jail, burnt their house down, wrecked their car and if they then went to an AA meeting, they would be greeted with something like, "Well George, we sure are glad you are here today. You definitely are in the right place." No judgment or making the person wrong. The results of AA and the power of unconditional love is the healing of millions of people from a progressive and historically incurable disease.

R. Buckminster Fuller was a 20th century mathematician, astronomer, inventor, and author. Fuller wrote extensively about the philosophical reasons for mankind's existence. He concluded that as human beings we are here to solve problems. That is our function. According to Fuller, we earn the right to be in this universe to the degree that we help our fellow man solve problems. The merit of human life is in this process.

The function and healing mechanism of support groups is that all the members help each other with the problems they face. In 12 step recovery groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous it is the 12th step which brings about permanent healing. The 12th step is the process of helping another member with their addiction problem. This is in alignment with Dr. Fuller's insights into what is our role as human beings. We are born into this world to help one another solve problems. Support groups are a natural and effective way to accomplish this.

Matthew McQuaid, DPM is a board certified foot surgeon practicing in Lakeport. He has a particular interest in Mind/Body medicine and its impact on healing. He is an award winning author and teacher. Please share this article with a friend. For more information please call 707-263-3727.