

*Love and intimacy are the root of what makes us sick and what makes unwell, what causes sadness and what brings happiness, what makes us suffer and what leads to healing...Dean Ornish*

There's an old adage that says the most significant journey we'll ever make in this life is when we travel the distance from our minds to the region of our hearts. Throughout the world's spiritual disciplines, deepening our relationship to the Heart, to the many expressions of Love, is considered the epicenter of all true healing. It is my belief that music, especially when played or created with an intent to soothe, inspire, and heal, has the power to awaken us to this inherent birthright we all share, this innate capacity to love and be loved.

After nearly fifty years of creating music, I'd like to share a bit of what I've learned about the healing power of music, especially when serving as a catalyst for feelings associated with love, service, compassion, and gratefulness, to name a few – resulting in a palpable connection with ourselves and others in ways that can measurably accelerate healing on many levels.

Of all the art forms, music is an astonishing emotional language that communicates to us in the most visceral and immediate of ways. Through powerful vibrational frequencies, timbres, harmonies, rhythms, and melodies, we respond to music innately, almost always before and apart from cognitive thought. From the Big Bang to the frequency of Earth to every sound and word we've ever heard or spoken, everything we are and everything we know is based on vibration. Vibration is the common denominator of the universe.

Therefore, I find it no mere coincidence that the very first sense humans develop in utero is hearing, and that the very last sense to go before we take our last breath is hearing, as well. This biological fact has always suggested to me that there is a *primacy* to listening, establishing this core way of experiencing life as a language all its own, essential when interfacing with the unseen worlds, with the Great Mystery, with Love itself.

However, when you look at the contemporary modalities for healing, (conventional and integrative), specifically regarding proactive environmental strategies that have been shown to stimulate emotional states of contentment, connection, and relaxation, this component is most often completely ignored, or at best, taken for granted. Just a

cursory look at the very design of most hospital rooms, with the ubiquitous television set protruding out of every wall, seems to make it clear what our priorities are.

Our eyes, (in cahoots with the parts of our brain that process information), utilize 90% of our linear discriminative faculties by constantly seeking streaming data that funnels through our optic nerves, endlessly ravenous for stimulation. This constant obsession with our visual portals successfully distracts us from what we're often feeling, preventing us from ever uncovering the partial truth that each of us are existentially alone, and that we are, in fact, going to die one day. Ironically, what this systemic bias also does is deprive us of the beauty of presence, of silence, of reverie, of wordless connection with others, and, with the remarkable atmospheric and emotional benefits of music, especially when the music is an evocation of love. Therefore, within healthcare, despite best intentions, very rarely are the emotional/spiritual dimension and its correlation to healing addressed in effective and meaningful ways.

While there's reams of evidence supporting the revelations of mind/body medicine, and of the importance of feeling connected to a force larger than ourselves, our cultures' institutions have relegated these heretofore uncharted matters of the heart to the more analytical mental health fields, or to our faith-based institutions. Historically, rarely have the twain (the realms of healthcare and direct environmental modalities designed to inspire feelings of Love, meaning, and connection) formally intersected. In fact, to think that any impedances to our ability to feel these expressions of Love could, in any way, influence our ability to favorably respond to healing protocols is often viewed with cynicism and derision.

However, times are changing.

A few years ago, I received a call from a man who had just lost his wife through a protracted illness and end of life process. It was a day after the memorial service, and from the sound of the elation in his voice, one would not have thought that this man had just lost his life partner of 50 years. But he shared with me this deeply moving story.

This man, who I will call Bernie, had four sons, all embroiled in a nasty feud of such proportions that not one of his sons would tolerate being in each other's presence, including in their mother's hospital room, even though their mother, Sarah, was seriously ill. This feud had been

going on for years now, and I can only imagine the despair, frustration and exhaustion Bernie was going through. And there was his wife, sick with a life-challenging illness, probably on the threshold of an end of life process, while all of his sons remained staunchly committed to their anger, to their righteousness, and to their position of not 'caving in'.

Apparently, during this time, a dear friend came to the hospital room to visit while one of the sons was present. This friend came in, turned off the television, and as luck would have it, brought with him a small CD player, on which he started playing the instrumental music from *Graceful Passages*, one of the projects for which I created the music specifically to assist people in soothing fears while traversing life's transitions and challenges.

After a few minutes of allowing the music to gently permeate the room's ambience, something, barely perceptible, started to shift the room's emotional tonality, subtly calling forth feelings from deep within the son who was present. He quietly started to cry, feeling the weight of his mother's illness, perhaps for the first time. And then, something remarkable happened. He woke up to the horror of what he and his brothers were perpetuating by remaining out of contact with one another during this extraordinary time. Within a few hours, he summoned the courage to contact the one brother with which he had a tiny opening, asking him if he would be willing to just listen to some music together. In a quiet room, for the first time in years, they sat together, and listened quietly to this music, and as they did, they mutually acknowledged the shifting tectonic plates within their hearts, gradually moving towards one another, in spite of themselves.

According to Bernie, one by one, a different brother was invited to listen to this music together and it took all of 48 hours for each of the four sons to come home to their senses, get out of their petty positions in order to show up for an event in their family's life that would be remembered forever. For the next month, they laughed together, cried together, forgave one another together, listened to music together, and most importantly, loved their mother together as she found her way home.

While telling me this story on the phone, Bernie was now in tears. Tears of gratitude to me for creating this music that had become an indelible part of their journey, tears of joy for being a part of helping his family heal their wounds with one another, and tears of fulfillment for helping them all learn to be a family together again. And I was in

tears, not only because of the enormous honor he had bestowed upon me by sharing his story, but also for the extraordinary gift I've been given, to use music as a language for loving, for healing, and for supporting people to remember what matters most in this life.

We live in a time where revelations that are being discovered in neuroscience, quantum physics, and molecular biology have simply not yet been integrated into the way we live and the way we approach healing. We now know that there are subtle yet significant and measurable factors that can affect how we think, feel, learn, grow, and relate with one another. However, we've lived in this Cartesian paradigm for so long ("I think, therefore I am"), that it's still viewed with cavalier skepticism when suggested that our emotional and spiritual states can significantly influence our immune system's capacities to recover from dis-ease.

However, music is one of the most underestimated of healing modalities, especially when used subtly as an environmental support tool, the way that it was used in Sarah's hospital room. When integrated sensitively, music could help us unravel our fears, soften our ability to feel again, and be open to looking at the glass half full for a change. And as you've seen with Bernie's family, it can induce emotional states of being that could dramatically and beneficially influence the outcome of seemingly intractable situations and circumstances.

When you can use music, subliminally or overtly, in order to instill direct experiences of what cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien calls "the Arms of Love" - Compassion, Service, Kindness, Appreciation, Forgiveness, and Presence, for example, - chances are you've increased the propensity for healing, if not of the body, then most assuredly of the heart and soul.

Next time you find yourself in an environment where dis-ease is present, allow yourself to experiment with this phenomenon by integrating music that you truly love, however subtly, into the environment in some way. You'll see that music can provide a powerful support tool for the healing journey, keeping us open, porous, humane, and grateful for being alive.