

A CHAPTER IN MY ROAD TO RECOVERY

By Wesley Sato

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A stroke is a conundrum of experiences. I was someone who suffered from the disease of perceived immortality, but the stroke made me aware of my mortality. It showed me how vulnerable and insignificant I was, yet very different from others. It also provided me with the opportunity to literally rewrite my destiny.

I came from a unique and culturally different background considered by some to be privileged. Now, I can't even joke about being a chosen one – the anointed one, even remotely similar to the Dalai Lama. After coming to terms with my affliction, I have accepted a future of living with this inconvenience, a lifetime of constant medication, a lasting reminder of my physical disability.

Being restricted in physical activities gave me more time for soul searching and solving my own mystery in order to live a life of significance. I began to connect more and more with the underlying field of infinite possibilities. I looked for a turning point, a personal break through, a revelation that brings with it new meaning.

I have made a quantum leap in my physical recovery. From a bedridden, seemingly motionless, stuttering individual, I am now able to move around, albeit slowly, and verbalize my thoughts effectively. On the emotional side, I had to achieve inner peace to heal this deep trauma from the stroke.

But how and where would I find inner peace? Would I find it in a special book - a crystalline distillation of insights and wisdom? I felt the answers were close – that what we most long to know is lodged deep within us. They can only come from perfect love – from where healing, compassion and faith flow. I felt this gnawing pain from within and examined it. I harbored ill feelings and hatred towards others. I dreaded the thought that others felt the same way towards me.

Harboring bad feelings and hating others had become a habit. I reached for it the way a chain smoker reaches for a cigarette, promising to quit, but somehow never kicking the habit. I challenged myself to take the next step in personal evolution. I wouldn't ask myself to be a saint or to give up any belief. I would forgive and ask forgiveness. To paraphrase the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me." I resolved to let go, to give back, to cease to harbor bad feelings.

One of my role models once said, "Forgiveness is the noblest exercise of the human spirit." I would be brutally honest with myself. I decided to forgive starting now, let go of my chaotic thinking, and return to mental wholeness. How true the saying is that the hurts won't heal until you forgive and that to withhold forgiveness is to remain the victim. I must forgive – first forgive myself, then others.

Self-forgiveness follows when we accept that mistakes are actually invaluable for our growth and learning, rather than terrible errors that only prove how flawed we are. When we can benefit from our mistakes in this way, we can feel encouraged to begin anew or to try again, rather than getting hung up on the fear of not being able to attain some impossible ideal of perfection.

To achieve this, I decided to draw up a list of those who I offended and those who offended me. I sent each one a note sincerely asking for or granting forgiveness and extending my hand in reconciliation. My note went something like this:

Dear _____,

I realize our relationship hasn't been on an ideal plane. I view our past as a treasure trove of life lessons rather than failures. From now on, let's make every day an invitation to start anew on a journey of love and peace.

Yours truly,

Among others, I asked forgiveness from my parents, a lost love, and an array of friends and enemies from my past. I also wrote to people who had hurt me during my career. I wrote the following to my adolescent sweetheart: "To lose you was painful. I was afraid that my next thought would be of you. But I realized loving is giving freedom. I have missed you far better than I ever loved you. I have discovered the traces of you that you left on my soul. It will never be the same. I will never be the same and because I treated you well, I like myself better. I find many things to be grateful for. I can say 'thank you' for being there for me, for being the inspiration for my writing, and for being the catalyst to many changes in me. Because of you, I reexamined my need for a significant other, and I reevaluated myself. I'm nicer to people. I'm more in touch with my feelings, the people and things around me. God's enlightenment and my love be with you in all that you are and in all that you do."

I now feel I am, in a way, a peacemaker. I no longer harbor resentment and I am on the road to healing. I start my day pondering a few lines from Hugh Prather: "I have never lived this day before. I am free to start fresh. My mistakes are in the past. They can be my shame or my measure of useful indicators. I will use them to renew my faith and strengthen my resolve. Because of my mistakes, I know what to do. Today I release the old ways that have split my mind and drained my power. I will fill my thoughts with the newness of love and the simplicity of peace. Today I open myself to others so that I may open my heart to God."