

THE ANATOMY OF A STROKE

I should say autopsy, but either way what follows are just some general comments I've had about my recent stroke. For those of us who have had strokes (I had a previous TIA – minor stroke), I find it interesting to understand (at least for me) what is something to worry about and what is mostly in our imagination, not that there is anything too benign about strokes.

I had to remind myself that just as illness, injury, and disease obviously physically can affect us, as long as our mind is clear, we are good to go. Of course, if we lose our mind, then all bets are off. We can't do much.

A severe shock (like a stroke) is like snuffing out the candle of our attachments with one blow. Gone! Strokes, as I understand them, are not about losing our mind in the classical sense, but rather about losing track of our mind, which (I'm sorry to say) is a bit like herding cats. Mostly, it can't be done.

The "Why?" is because it's the nature of the Self, which is to be a collection of our attachments and fixations. And when in a stroke the Self is shattered, the problem with getting all our attachments or fixations back in one piece is that after (and through) a stroke We change and not only temporarily lose our particular fixations, we also have new and different fixations and attachments and often very few at all.

In that sense the Self can't come back just as it was and, most important, WE change through the stroke-process, so we often don't want attachments back. LOL. Now, that's an insoluble problem, especially when we change as to what we like and dislike.

I got a personal tour of all of this during my recent stroke (my second stroke), which totally disrupted my life, turned it upside down and, like changing the course of a river, is still changing my life's course. There is nothing like first-hand experience of a health crisis to absorb you. It's confusing by nature. LOL.

Now, keep in mind that as the stroke came on I am told i was

pretty-much babbly some incoherent stuff. And acting strange too. For example, Margaret tells me I was standing at the stove frying tortillas and when I got to about the ninth tortilla in a row, Margaret knew that something was off. Being unable to articulate or find and put words together lasted for a while and then reoccurred as I tired.

Aside from being incoherent, the first flush of the stroke-experience found me running around trying to figure out what I had lost. Did I still have all my fingers and toes, so to speak? And, of course, that is kind of an impossible task, since if we really lost something other than one of the five senses, how would we know we lost it? So, there is was a lot of self-inflicted suffering in the beginning, in my case.

What I forgot to remember at the time is that aside from impaired senses (I lost a little hearing for a while), we can't lose the actual nature of the mind, nor our intrinsic awareness. In other words, I can be aware that I have been harmed by the stroke, but that awareness that is aware of my injury itself is not injured or harmed. That is what I mean by intrinsic awareness. Our native Awareness is alive and well and very much still there – unharmed and taking all this in.

In fact, that may be most all we have right after a stroke, a pure awareness stripped of any self-attachment and fixations, something quite unusual for us. The Self has been vacated almost totally. In fact, for most of us, the only time we are not compromised by fixation is when we undergo a personal shock strong enough to shatter our attachments. Then, indeed, we are (temporarily) like a yogi, at least enlightened of our attachments. We still may be running around like a chicken with its head cut off, as they used to say, but inside there it is like new-fallen snow: there are no bells ringing. Silence.

Just as we stamp in a puddle, the force of our shoe forces the water out of the depression, yet it soon flows back in. This is what happens when our Self is shattered by a powerful or frightening experience; our self soon re-establishes and reanimates itself, but it takes time. It took me a lot of time, like more than a week.

In my case, I found the force or shock of my recent stroke

stunning yet absolutely clarifying. There was not a thought in the mental sky, aside from the flurry of worry-thoughts about losing my mind. LOL.

I was not worried about “losing my mind” in the classic sense because there my mind was doing the worrying, but rather I was worried about losing track of my mind, which was a losing battle. Like William Blake wrote “Nothing of equal value was lost.” Most of my lost attachments I’m better off without. The Self naturally is like a kaleidoscope, so compound that by a forced vacation and its anyone’s guess just how the Self will reanimate itself.

In summary, I was upset enough that I did not even stop to remember that we can’t lose our mind, but we very much can lose our sense of Self (and fixations) for a shorter or a longer time. In my case, it was for a week or more and that tide of self is still coming in. Some of my previous attachments will never make it back as part of my Self, which is fine by me. One the other hand, I need a little something to fixate on if only for old time’s sake. It’s been like Antarctica around here; no fuzzy-wuzzy. The home decorating of our selves is a very personal matter.

As mentioned, it’s been an austere sense of cold-turkey I experienced with the stroke, one mostly with little attachment or fixation. All that just vacated. Nothing. How scary that was, but also strangely refreshing. Not a cloud in the mental sky.

Weeks later, I’m still on a shoe-string diet as far as attachments go, getting along with less and liking it more. In fact, many of those attachments I use to have now kind of nauseate me, so obvious to me now that it was just me pandering to myself, now that I see them clearly.

I believe each person could benefit from studying the Self and the self’s particular collection of attachments and fixations. I see that most of them are just diversions or pure entertainment..

[Why an image of the Sun? Because the blast of a stroke blows out the candle of the Self at least long enough for us to see the Sun of the mind, if only for a short while.]

“As Bodhicitta is so precious,
May those without it now create it,
May those who have it not destroy it,
And may it ever grow and flourish”

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