

The Zen of MS



That's what we're all looking for, isn't it?

The truth is, when you find your zen, it is much easier to heal. I don't mean heal in the sense of "find a cure," but rather in the sense of "I am happy with my life and feel like I am the best person that I can be, disease or not." I'm confessing to you that I'm the latter.

Is that sacrilege?

There's a little bonus that goes with it, too. By accepting your circumstances and living a better life, your health improves, and you put yourself in the best position for any therapies to work.

That's not to say that having this disease is freakin' awesome, but I am saying that it opened a lot of doors that would have otherwise remained shut. Honestly, happiness, compassion and "lack of attachment" do a lot to get you on the path towards healing. At least they did for me.

Whatever you're working on, don't think of it as a light switch where your only options are to win or lose. Think of it as a dimmer switch—you're better off today than you were yesterday, and you'll be even better (and brighter) tomorrow.

When I was diagnosed with MS in 2008, it was like being hit over the head with a 2x4. I would call home, crying, because I thought that my life would be forever changed from the marathon running, climbing the corporate ladder and part-time musician persona that I had

used to define myself.

The biggest worry I had, though, was how my kids were going to remember me.

Almost immediately, I started looking at nutrition. I was desperate and that was my background. Truthfully, I didn't know what else to do. I was scared. I started to figure out what foods really triggered fatigue (for me).

OK—that showed me that I could have an impact on this thing if I set my mind to it. It was on!

Then I started going to support groups and talking about the importance of enrollment and clinical trials, which was something else I had experience with. I really had a knack for it and felt better when I did it.

Not only talking about what I knew, but also helping others to understand it.

Ever since then, I've been trying to take control of the things that I felt like I'd lost control of. We're talking about the amount of sleep that I get, the amount of stress that I'm under and how to reduce it (e.g. meditation), exercise (again—not being attached to someone else's definition of exercise, but doing what works for me), and doing things that make me feel good and happy.

I don't do things that abuse my body, even if they give me temporary pleasure. How often do you find yourself skipping a workout or sacrificing sleep because of perceived necessity? Or because you just don't feel like it?

I've figured out that the temporary pleasure or skipping a workout, makes me feel worse in the long run. That's not to say that I never indulge—it's just that everything I do is calculated.

I'm not preaching or claiming my life is the best and that you should be like me, but I'm telling you that, since "retiring" from my research administration job, I've taken to helping others in a lot of areas. I cannot begin to explain the level of happiness that comes from making others happy.

And what it does for my health! "Give and you shall receive." This really propelled me to focus on my journey through serving others.

Yes, I spend part of my time in a wheelchair. No, my hands don't really work anymore. Yes, my speech can be garbled, and I'm heat intolerant. Yes, I feel like I have the bladder of a pregnant chipmunk.

And yes, I'm as happy as I've ever been and am not sure I would go back in time if I could.

So, take control of your life! Nothing makes **me** special. Use your gift to serve others and work on making **you** better—not because I told you to, but because **you** want to.