

en their lives. The conclusion: The role of optimism had been highly overrated in cancer survival. While this study undermined the role of positive thinking in healing, many physicians still continued to support the theory that positive thinking was effective in improving life quality. Dr. Abraham Verghese in a February 22, 2004 *NY Times* article explained that thinking we have supernatural, positive powers to drive away illness is simplistic. However, positive thinking helps us *to live with an illness* instead of *die from it*. Hope is a wonderful thing—Emily Dickinson called it, “The thing with feathers.” However, we have to simplify our hope keeping it realistic and reasonable.

Don’t be the judge who finds you guilty!

Many of us are highly experienced and extremely creative when it comes to conjuring up disturbing, guilt-ridden feelings. We start to feel sorry for ourselves, displeased, disappointed or just plain miserable. Here are some of the guilty thoughts that people have shared. Just saying them out loud in our group session prompted tears of relief and freedom. In fact, one guilty revelation prompted another, “If you didn’t open up and say that you felt guilty, I never would have opened up either. I have never said this aloud to anyone.” Here is a sampling of their deep-felt sharings:

- ◆ It’s been a year and everyone tells me that I should be over my husband’s death. I hold back my tears, but I still want to cry. I feel guilty that I still miss him.
- ◆ My husband comes home from work and I don’t have dinner prepared and our home is chaotic because my son who is autistic is running wild while his older brother is watching TV instead of doing his homework. I feel guilty that I can’t manage a quieter and more relaxed home environment for my husband.
- ◆ My husband was self-destructive. He smoked, drank, gambled and ignored our two boys. He died as a result of

his lifestyle. I feel guilty that I am relieved by his death and that he will no longer set a bad example for my two young sons.

- ◆ I loved my husband and he died after a five-year struggle with heart disease. He was weak and a shell of what he was. He didn't want to live like this. After his third surgery, he died from infection. I felt guilty that during that time I admitted to my sister that I was tired of his illness. I feel like I willed him to die. Perhaps, I could have done more or pursued a different treatment.
- ◆ I feel guilty about switching to another doctor. I don't know how to ask for my medical records and my test results.
- ◆ I have had so many failed relationships; I will never find love.

Over the years I have encountered many women who feel responsible for their pain or their illness; somehow they should have seen it coming and prevented it. However, there is a clear distinction between feeling guilty and assuming responsibility for an illness. When we assume responsibility, we make every effort to heal the mind and the body. We partner our healing with the treatment. We don't fight the treatment or see it as poison. Instead we view it to be curative and yield to it. When we feel guilty, we disrupt our body from functioning properly and rob our spirit of its vitality. We fight the treatment and with this added stress, we throw our body off balance and make it harder for the treatment to work.

For example, because of the spiritual component of disease, some people are overwhelmed with guilt because they are sick and unable to cure their illness or that of a loved one's with their optimism or faith. They reason that their illness must be a Divine punishment because of a fundamental failure in their flawed spirituality. They conclude that they are simply not good enough or not happy enough and somehow deserve it. So, they