

Angel Invitation Number Three: Allow, Accept, Surrender

I've been asking myself about the difference between allowing and accepting. At first, I thought it was the same thing at different times. Before it happens, I allow it. After it happens, I accept it.

Allow: to let, to permit, to make provision for, to grant. Antonym: deny.

Accept: to receive, to regard as proper or true, to endure resignedly or patiently, to agree to take. Antonym: refuse, reject.

Reading those definitions, I don't want them anywhere near my disease. But I am sure they are an important part in my healing.

One discomfort I have with "allow" is that it implies that I had a choice. I think back to the philosophy that insisted that I did, in fact, choose to have MS. It's not a bad theoretical exercise. Being disabled has provided me with an easy excuse not to have a powerful career, not to accomplish too much. It has smoothed some of my rough edges; it has increased my patience and compassion. It has given me a focus for my creative output. It hasn't been all bad. The flip side of the philosophy, though, is that if I chose to be disabled, I can choose not to be. That idea has fed the monsters. If I believe that I can make myself get well, I want to try every idea I can find on a Website. I want to spend any amount of money, deny myself various pleasures, separate myself from others and despair when things do not improve. The truth is I am not in control here. I did not allow this disease.

It is helpful, though, for me to allow the disease its symptoms. If I am numb or weary or unable to move, I need to allow the sensation. Denying them, I may not do what I need to do: move or rub or rest or get help. Maybe part of the problem is language. If I say, "I am so tired and disabled that I'm going to stop moving," I will increase my fatigue and disability. On the other hand, if I deny my symptoms and keep pushing when I shouldn't or try walking without help, I'll increase my fatigue and risk injury.

The best definition of allow, in relationship to my MS, may be "make provision for". What will serve me best is to recognize my situation and make provisions for it. There's that wonderful word again: discernment.

Discernment: exhibiting keen insight and good judgment.

Once I am aware of the sensations (or lack thereof) in my body, I need to discern what action I need to take to make provision for them. There is no rule, no policy, to tell me whether I should exercise or rest. I have to pay attention and make a choice. Then I have to notice what happens, pay attention and make another choice. We are all experimenting in the laboratory of our selves.

Accepting is a happier word, for me. Someone else has dealt the cards; I am just picking them up. There's this additional piece, though, of being a good sport about it. I have to regard the situation as "right or true" and endure it patiently. Someone said the best response to the question, "Why, me?" is "Why not?" If I could wish my MS experience onto someone else, who would it be, really? I couldn't be that mean. Then it becomes easier to accept my MS.

Here, again, there needs to be middle ground. "She hasn't accepted reality," declared an art therapist, looking at the picture the teenaged beauty queen, now brain-injured and in a wheelchair, had drawn of herself dancing on a table. The assignment had been to "draw yourself five years from now." I wouldn't be so quick to judge (reason #439 why I am not an art therapist). I hope that girl has since danced on tables. She might have been dancing on the table right that minute: dancing out her frustration, her fears, dancing to insist on her beauty and ability. Acceptance isn't unconditional surrender.

Here, allowing and accepting look the same to me: If I reject that I have MS, I will suffer more because I won't take care of myself. If I surrender completely, I will suffer more because I will deny myself use of abilities I still have.

I am most happy and healed when I find the middle ground. The monsters insist that I must find it cautiously, consistently and perfectly. The angels agree that I may seek it joyfully, fumblingly, in syncopated time. It's the seeking, not the finding, that will polish me smooth.