

A Rolling Perspective: This IS My Normal

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10/10/2018



If you choose to listen, you can give your body what it asks for: sleep, a good cry, exercise, nourishing food, pure water, a hug.

Wheelchair users get such questions by caring people as, “What happened?” or the more blunt, “What’s wrong with you?” When I hear those questions, I look around to see who they mean. Then I realize they’re talking to *me*.

“Oh!” I say. “There’s nothing wrong with me. This *is* my normal.”

They blink a few times, murmur “Oh...okay,” and leave, perplexed.

People assume that if you’re in a wheelchair, there’s something wrong with you. Indeed, I think many wheelchair users *also* believe there’s something wrong with them. They haven’t yet realized that their wheelchair is the most natural, practical, and helpful thing in the world—at least right now. Believing that you shouldn’t be in a wheelchair—when in fact you are—causes deep suffering. I choose not to suffer that way anymore.

We use words whose meanings we believe we share: honest, fair, or even our friend, *normal*. But the truth is, we do *not* share these meanings; instead, we create definitions based on our perceptions.

Let’s alter our perception of the term “perfect.” Doesn’t *perfect* mean that something or someone cannot get or be better than it is? *In this moment*, can you or I be different than we are? The key is: *in this moment*. And I hate to break it to you, but we only *have* this moment.

We may choose to alter our behavior in the next moment, or the one after that, but there is no way *in this moment* to change what’s happening. By definition, it’s *perfect*. We confuse *perfect* with *ideal*. Ideals, when we feel we’re not meeting them, make us feel not-good-enough in that moment and thus rob us of our greatest gift: the *present*.

To believe that we are not “normal” also robs us of the present. It’s saying to the universe or your Higher Power: “Not good enough. I don’t want this present. Give me another one.” Don’t *you* hate hearing that after you’ve spent big money on the perfect gift? Yet many of us do this day in, day out.

Let’s get back to *normal*. We have the perception—aided and abetted by the billions of dollars poured into advertising—that there is a *normal* out there, and if we just buy/do/say the “right thing,” it can be ours. We who are older think we remember a time when we were normal. (Um...yeah.) We spend every waking moment and most of our savings trying to recapture that. (They don’t call it “lost youth” for nothing.) Young people spend *their* money and time trying to ward off or postpone the Demon, Age. (Thus, “youth is wasted on the young.”) Living in the past or fearing the future is a surefire way to waste your present in suffering. And it’s utterly needless, for neither past nor future normals exist. Few people recognize that the present *is* their normal, and it’s just *perfect* the way it is.

What great news! If you change how you think about it, then right here, right now, YOU’RE NORMAL! And your body knows exactly how to get you to *your* normal—not the ideal you’re harboring. It’s constantly giving you feedback. Maybe instead of muffling what it’s trying to tell you (with social media, drugs, alcohol, or shopping, to name a few), you might like to listen to it. Your body, with its neural networks and receptors and genes, works tirelessly and *perfectly* behind the scenes, listening to how unhappy you are and how you wish you were someone/somewhere/something else. It loves you anyway and gives you a constant stream of feedback to let you know what systems need your attention *now*—not twenty years from now, or twenty years ago. If you choose to listen, you can give it what it asks for: sleep, a good cry, exercise, nourishing food, pure water, a hug.

We arrived in life hardwired with incredible healing powers. We can switch our genes on and off with a mere thought; we can change the course of our own lives in a nanosecond. The caveat? We must be *present* to do so. We’ve been conditioned to regard our world in a binary way—good/bad; right/wrong; normal/not normal—as if we were computers and not humans. We wonder why we feel so out of place, and agonize because we don’t have/look/

act like “everyone else.” It is very painful indeed for social animals like ourselves to feel like we’re just *wrong* the way we are. It’s painful because it’s so untrue. We are not just one thing or its opposite; there are as many normals as there are people. Not an ideal system, but it is *perfect*.

Our complex body systems have infinite capabilities and thus, an infinite number of “normals.” We’re equal spokes on the ginormous wheel of time, yet we each have a slightly different perspective of that wheel and our place in it. We cannot adjust its spin, but we can know we’re perfectly placed. And *normal*.

Jennifer Holland taught herself to read and write at age four and has been doing both ever since. Minnesota-born and Wisconsin-based, she nonetheless inherited the Irish penchant for travel. Despite the shoestring budget, she visited a dozen countries before her 40th birthday, and even lived in Ireland for nearly three years. Her encounters with other cultures inform the quirky insights into human behavior that find their expression in her poetry, novels, and non-fiction works. When she's not reading or writing, she enjoys chair yoga, video chats with her children and grandchildren, and living happily with MS on a tiny fixed income.

