The third alphabet in HEAL represents Acceptance.

Acceptance is key to the process of healing.

In Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’ original model of bereavement, acceptance is the final stage of recovery from grief.

As in bereavement, when a person falls ill, especially with a chronic mental illness such as schizophrenia, there is the possibility of loss – the loss of a job, the loss of a scholarship, the breakup of a marriage – all of which can be traced to some loss of function that comes with the illness. Similarly, caregivers may ‘lose’ a son or a daughter or a spouse or a parent when that loved one develops a mental illness.

What can we do then, apart from accepting whatever that has happened as inevitable? Seeking to blame circumstances or people leads nowhere.

In fact, it is only when we accept that we move towards a positive line of action that helps, soothes and heals.

I see the practice of fasting as a parallel.

When a Muslim accepts that in the month of Ramadhan he should refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk, he would be careful to observe all the requisites of fasting such as eating the predawn meal, observing the daily prayers and breaking fast with a healthy meal. The result? What seems extremely difficult to others turns out to be relative easy for the accepting Muslim.

The same goes for persons with mental illness and their caregivers. When they accept the reality of mental illness, they will be careful to do whatever is necessary to recover – be it to take medication, to attend useful counselling and support group sessions, or to mingle with people who are positive and who aid in recovery, and to avoid those who see the world through dark lenses and who pull others down with them. They develop recipes for success because they have accepted and they have chosen to move on.

Islam teaches us that behind everything that happens is a reason (hikmah). Full realisation of this simple truth will allow a believer to accept every challenge with grace and dignity. It equips him with the twin qualities of patience and perseverance.

For the righteous, they are not overly stressed by any task at hand because these tasks are viewed as ‘tests’ from Allah to see who among them the true believers are:

“Or do you think that you shall enter the Garden (of Bliss) without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity, and were so shaken in spirit that even the apostle and those of faith who were with him cried: ‘When will come the help of God?’ Ah! Verily the help of God is always near!” (Al-Baqarah 2:214)
I went to China recently (1–8 June 2015) and saw not only breathtaking sights, I also gained a deeper insight of myself. I would like to share the journey within and the journey without.

I count myself lucky to be alive every day. That thought keeps me grounded in the fact that life on earth is short and must be appreciated. Seldom do we get near death experiences, but a brush with death and health issues during the short break in Yunnan left me with a different take on life. Dr Radiah reminded me of my mortality.

I was in a low mood when I left Changi Airport for China but I remained hopeful that the mood would balance out and to the positive soon. As long as I do good things, I think positively and know where I want to be, that is how things turn out. The turning point came after two days of being a picture of depression, when I literally began buzzing with happiness.

I have bipolar disorder and the mood swings between high and low are really evident unlike the normal human experience of feeling happy or sad. In fact, I had two episodes of mania overseas in the past – once in Istanbul and the other in Kuala Lumpur – so my mood swings are really evident unlike the normal human experience of feeling happy or sad.

When a family member becomes ill, and in particular if he or she shows symptoms of mental illness such as a severe change in mood or behavior, how do family members and people with mental illness react? How do we facilitate acceptance on the part of family members and people with mental illness? What about acceptance to take medications? For Club HEAL’s participant Kasyful Ikhlash Bin Abdullah, 26, acceptance is like being a fish in deep sea amidst beautiful corals and sea creatures.

The Chinese that we met live in the mountains and plant fruits and vegetables in picturesque terraced slopes. They work hard for a simple life and plant on every plot of available land.

Our tour organiser, Ms Mariah Mah, brought us to schools and churches that she helped build through donations from Singaporeans who support her missionary work. Singaporeans who have helped fund the project include TCM doctor, Mr Yusof, that remedial care for the mentally ill was not easily available. As such, my mind left to count the streets. They live in a world of their own, even rolling naked on the streets.

Perhaps Singaporeans can help sponsor a student to become a psychologist who will serve these areas when he or she graduates. It is a small gesture that we can make to help life better for those with mental illness in China.

The street sights were also colourful, with snacks that we have never encountered before on offer, such as a nest of fried potato chips with a fried egg in the middle. The food was good and I enjoyed the meals. Crossing the unfamiliar roads, however, was a challenge. Drivers were everywhere, sometimes a whole family of four would be riding on one, and not just on roads, but even on pavements!

The natural sights of China were amazing, such as the Stone Forest, where rock formations that used to be under the sea surfaced about 750 million years ago, creating magical sights.

The most important thing about the trip, however, remained the fact that I found the strength in myself above all. I needed to complete my mission even when it hurt so much that I wanted to give up. In and succeeding, my belief that reliance on Allah will see me through any situation was reinforced.

I took up running because I felt so much better doing something because when we reached the top, I was told that the tram was not working and that we had to walk another 3km – more steps to climb!

In the end, having pushed the extra mile and knowing that I could conquer my fears, my sense of achievement was absolutely satisfying.

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4. Fast-a-thon cum Iftar @ BBE (27 Jun)
60 non-Muslim from all walks of life join Fast-a-thon 2015
Almost twice the number of fast-a-thoners took part this year, compared to last year, during the yearly Ramadan Fast and Feast organised by Club HEAL. This year’s event was jointly organised with Bukit Batok East MAEC, as part of the SG50 KITA Service to Nation week, and was held in the spacious multi-purpose hall at Bukit Batok East Community Club. We raised $3,000 through the 60 fast-a-thoners.

As noted by our Guest-of-Honour, Mdm Halimah Yacob, the fast-a-thon aimed to bring Muslims and non-Muslims closer by fasting and breaking their fast together. “Nothing beats sharing a common experience together to help us understand each other better. It is an experience which I think our non-Muslim friends will never forget,” she said.

Broke fast on ice cold water
Said fast-a-thon participant and Club HEAL’s adviser, Dr Joseph Leong, who succumbed to his thirst, “I was offered a cold glass of water. It was something so simple yet delicious and I accepted it. I have failed at this challenge for two years but I now understand what fasting means to Muslims. It is not just to be hungry the whole day and to feast at night.”

Another fast-a-thoner, BBE grassroots leader Mr Kumar, said, “It was a beautiful experience, very humbling.” Indeed breaking fast together with friends and neighbours was awesome, but as people kept streaming in before the iftar (breaking of fast), there were worries that there would not be enough places to sit and dine. But not to worry, we shared and thus we managed.

Islamic’s famous briyani
The main dish was the delicious chicken biryani cooked and donated by Islamic Restaurant. And for those who could not do without porridge, there was plenty of that to go around as well.

5. Nationwide Friday prayers mosque collection (10 Jul)
We raised $40,000 by the grace of God. 95 volunteers and staff offered help, including PADI, an association of Muslim taxi drivers who provided transport for volunteers. A big thank you to all involved. You have helped us help PMHIs recover and lead fulfilling lives.

My Mind Will Grow Flowers
I will grow flowers in my mind
I will be kind and so very compassionate and pluck every thought of muck
no mess you see in this brain
it will contain nothing ill of anyone
not about you
not even about me
and never ever about God
He’s been good
praises and thanks and praises
I will pause
smell the rose or coffee or rain
notice the beauty
slowly unfrown
unhurriedly build what will be sound
as I grow flowers in my mind

(To be continued)

(As Sumaiyah Mohamed)