

# **'Healing and the Healing Relationship'**

**- A look at some wider considerations in the Health and Holistic movement -**

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## **Introduction**

***This article is a metaphysical and philosophical 'tour' through the field of 'holism' and 'holistic health'. It seeks to give some context of meaning within which the various therapeutic modalities can be seen to relate to one another.***

***It also aims to provide a wider field guide for the 'newer consumer', indicating some of the deeper philosophies implied in 'radical healing'.***

## **Healing and wholeness**

In English, the terms 'health', 'wholeness' and 'holiness' all derive from a common root.

The expression 'healing unto wholeness' also conveys that beyond the level of symptom relief and cure, the healing process leads into broader areas of integration, harmony and balance:

*All is undivided wholeness in flowing movement*

Wholeness and the Implicate Order: David Bohm

*You are an instrument of the greatest power in the Universe...Within yourself there are the means for achieving all that is necessary for your growth and development.*

Guidance from Silver Birch pp 118-117

*Every disease can be cured... There is no such thing as an incurable disease. There are only people who could be incurable.*

Philosophy of Silver Birch pp 133

*The cause of all sickness, illness and disease is disharmony. Health is wholeness; health is when there is right rhythm and balance between body, mind and spirit....if they are not in proper alignment, if the focus is wrong somewhere, there is an interference with the natural vitality and so you get illness.*

Philosophy of Silver Birch pp 123

In the biblical account of the ten lepers made well by Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 17 v.11-19), only one leper returned to give thanks. This 'attitude of

gratitude' conveyed that although all ten were considered to have been physically cured or 'cleansed' as the account puts it, only one was considered to have been 'healed'. Only one had changed in mind and been touched in soul.

These deeper attitudinal changes are part of the emphasis of holistic healing, which aims not just at treating the whole person - body, mind and spirit - but also at facilitating a changed and more expansive orientation towards life itself. As the American psychologist William James stated: 'It has been one of the most important findings of psychology in the twentieth century that a person can change their life by changing their attitude'. Or as Ernest Holmes wrote in *The Science of Mind*, 'To learn how to think is to learn how to live'.

## **Adversity**

*Sometimes it takes an experience like mourning, sorrow, suffering or illness to awaken you out of your torpor and the soul comes into its own.*

Guidance from Silver Birch pp 26

This article seeks to home in on the body and its symptoms from the widest possible perspective, rather than move from the symptoms of the body out into the life context, as is characteristic of the traditional medical viewpoint.

Ordinary daily life from a spiritual perspective is the most perfect ashram, therapeutic, or learning environment in which we could ever hope to find ourselves. In fact, the purpose of life in physicality may well be to learn how to journey through the physical to discover ourselves beyond the physical.

Life provides its own daily opportunities for development and awakening if we remain aware and attentive to the depth of each present moment.

However, this degree of disciplined attentiveness to the freshness of each moment is unusual in today's speed-obsessed world. More and more our outward entrainment and our addiction to activity means that our intuitive guidance about how to balance and develop ourselves is not heeded.

Eventually we evoke for ourselves at both personal and collective levels, crises and catastrophes which cut through our distractions to the raw essentials of life and to our basic purpose in being human.

Often, in the aftermath of a health, mental or emotional crisis and with the time made available during recovery, people find themselves exploring complementary and alternative approaches to health and self-development as part of their attempt to re-orientate their lives.

In a sense, no one receives healing until they are ready to receive it, and healing may often come in a form which we do not initially recognise. The comedy actor Michael J Fox began developing symptoms of Parkinson's disease before he was thirty years old. They began to take over quite rapidly and ended a flourishing acting career. Despite this, after the initial shock and despondency, he looked back on the development of this condition a few years later in his autobiography and said that what he had learned about life and himself through Parkinsonism had outweighed the detriment of having it. When all was said and done, he still considered himself to be 'A Lucky Man'.

## Choices

Life throws us back on ourselves in each moment to choose and to choose again how we are going to relate to events and circumstances. Sometimes we choose to succumb to bitterness, disillusionment, resentment and depression. Sometimes, like Michael J Fox, Christopher Reeve, Helen Keller and so many others, we use our circumstances to dig deep within ourselves to find a source of strength and sustainment which can overcome what has occurred. The crisis becomes a challenge and an opportunity, rather than a punishment. This necessitates an engagement of will and a fundamental belief that there is a hidden purpose to things which we have the power to realise. It is also facilitated by loving, wise and compassionate support.

So much depends on the *choices* we make in relation to our circumstances. It is not just the events of our lives, but the responses we choose to make to those events. In illness and adversity there is a hidden challenge which throws us beyond the material to try and find within ourselves the resources to transcend our circumstances.

Facing severe illness or crisis can evoke a courage and tenacity we did not know we possessed. It can also test and refine at the deepest level of experience the basic questions with which others are only theoretically concerned: 'Who am I? Why am I here? Why is this happening to me? What is my purpose in life?'

Illness and adversity can also involve the testing out of the integrity of our ties with others. We are all, through free will, intimately involved with one another, through ties of cause and effect which go beyond time and space. Others are also involved in making free-will choices towards those who are unable to help themselves. For them, the choice involves whether to serve or not to serve and how to learn to serve wisely and well.

*It is only by plumbing the depths of the soul that the gifts of the spirit which the individual possesses can attain the bloom of their maturity*

Guidance from Silver Birch pp 27

The medical intuitive Carolyn Myss refers to the 'wisdom chips' we are expected to glean from our experience. This is why healing, learning and awareness are integral to one another and why complete healing always involves a changed state of consciousness. Indeed, from the holistic perspective, where change may not include the recovery of the body, the late spiritual flowering can be the main aspect of healing. Healing is not only a matter of what occurs at the bodily level.

The metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell wrote of the deeper awareness that can be found through adversity:

*My Love is of a birth as rare  
As 'tis for object strange and high  
It was begotten by Despair  
Upon Impossibility*

*Magnanimous Despair alone  
Could show me so divine a thing  
Where feeble Hope could ne'er have flown  
But vainly flapped its tinsel wing*

### **What heals?**

*To heal is to touch with love  
That which we previously touched with fear*  
Stephen Levine

So, what is it that heals and what are the essentials of a healing relationship? At its most fundamental, healing unto wholeness becomes a spiritual undertaking to overcome our sense of separation from Source (the Ground of our Being, Life, Spirit, God, call it what you will).

This is the emphasis of a book called 'Healing the Cause' by Michael Dawson, which is a distillation of a channelled work of the late 1970s called 'A Course In Miracles'. The stated aim of ACIM is the restoration of inner peace and the means of obtaining this is through the practice of forgiveness and the completion of its course in re-training the mind.

### **Soul and mind**

*The most difficult thing is to hear one's own soul*  
Conversations With God, Book 1: Neale Donald Walsche

Native American cultures and shamanic traditions also talk in terms of soul loss and soul retrieval. The soul lives in current time in an eternal Now. Our minds, however, are often diffused between unresolved past experiences and the future expectations which we build upon them. Where this is the case, the freedom and clarity of the present moment becomes lost in an alternation between past memories and future anxieties.

*The past is gone. Whatever mistakes you have made you must forget. You come into your world to make mistakes and to learn from them. Forget the past. It is the present that matter.*

Philosophy of Silver Birch pp137

The mind tends to run under its own momentum of past conditioning and meets each present situation on the basis of past experience. The point of power, where we can best act – the present – becomes eclipsed. The result is a squirrel-cage of past conditioning that tends to increase with age and accumulated experience. Older people are automatically assumed in our culture to be more set in their ways and resistant to change.

The only way out of the cage is to calm and slow down the mind enough to allow breakthroughs of inspiration and intuition and to have the courage to act on those intuitive prompts.

Carolyn Myss refers to unreleased negative memories from the past as 'psychic weight' and says that the effect of having to filter our present intuitive guidance through this layer of past conditioning is that we must 'wait' for an answer to our request for inspiration and direction.

Perhaps the most corrosive influences on the human mind are resentment, fear, worry and guilt. The progressive release of these 'useless' emotions is the purpose of books like ACIM, Louise L Hay's 'You can heal your life and Susan Jeffers admirable 'Feel the fear and do it anyway'.

Some people, who believe in a judgemental, punishing and retributive God, also feel very guilty and sinful for the normal mistakes they have made in the course of human learning. The sense of guilt seeks alleviation through punishment and can manifest through illness and accident in a paradoxical attempt to pre-empt future punishment by God.

This raises the role of the mind in cure, self-healing and the maintenance of health, as in the statements of William James and Ernest Holmes, already quoted.

The human mind is very powerful and thought energy is creative. A sense of optimism and purpose is beneficial, even necessary to our health.

## **Learned behaviour and conditioning**

*Education is what we are left with once we have forgotten all that we were taught.*

The Hidden Curriculum: Benson R Snyder

In his book 'Learned Helplessness', the psychologist Martin Seligman said that he had been inspired in his thinking by a chance happening that occurred at a university animal behaviour research laboratory he had been asked to visit. Seligman was on his way to the animal behavioural research facility when a colleague approached him to tell him that there was no longer any point in his attending that day since the dogs were 'playing up' and were refusing to respond. The particular experiment at issue was one in which the hapless creatures were placed on a floor with a low dividing partition. Periodically, electric shocks were applied beneath the flooring through the dogs' feet. By trial and error the dogs soon discovered that they could relieve the distress caused in this way by hopping over the partition onto the other side of the fence.

The difficulty came, however, when the regular alternating system of shocks was randomised, creating an initial sense of anxiety and chaos. Under these conditions the dogs became distressed, then forlorn and helpless, eventually lying down passively and trying to go to sleep. They refused to co-operate.

Seligman realised that because of sustained unpredictable conditions, the dogs had lost any sense of agency and control over their situation. Feeling that circumstances were completely beyond their control, they had simply

given up any further attempt to influence outcomes and become passive and withdrawn.

This sense of helplessness and hopelessness is a central characteristic of depression. Seligman intuitively realised that far from being a biological 'given', the tendency to depression could be a *learned* response to childhood circumstances which were similarly inconsistent, chaotic and unpredictable. Seligman thought that what circumstances had produced in the immature ego of earlier childhood, was a pessimistic 'mind-set' in which individuals felt insufficient to deal with life circumstances. They behaved as if their future was destined to repeat their past. Since thought, speech and action are all co-creative, this tended to generate a self-fulfilling prophecy and the future indeed came to mirror the past.

## Psychotherapy

*Psychotherapy occurs in the overlap of two people at play.*

Playing and Reality: D W Winnicott

Through various means, the different modes of psychotherapy all seek a way out of this closed cycle of self-determinism.

Dynamic forms of psychotherapy (Freudian, Jungian, and Reichian etc.) are all based on re-visiting and to some extent re-living earlier traumatic experience. The same applies to more recent therapies such as re-birthing, Holotropic breathwork, hypnotic regression and past-life recall. In the first group, information is accessed through the 'transference relationship' with the therapist. In the latter, information is accessed through hypnosis and 'non-ordinary states of consciousness' (NOSCs). With correct support and guidance, the energy locked up in past symptoms and learned inhibitions can be released for current living.

Modern forms of psychological intervention, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) tend to favour a present orientated approach to existing difficulties rather than past-life retrospection and recall. They instead focus on how beliefs sustain unadaptive behaviour patterns and how these sustaining beliefs can be identified, questioned and altered.

Forms of therapy like psychosynthesis and the modern emergence of life-coaching focus on another aspect of mind, its *future orientation*, visions, goals, hopes and aspirations. This is a prospective emphasis which focuses on the clarification and energising of future goals to provide the momentum to overcome present obstacles. Both of these forms of therapy tend to have a stronger support and motivational emphasis. The same might also be said of well conducted psychic readings, which, at their best, provide support, validation and a sense of personal direction to individuals.

Seligman wrote a sequel book to 'Learned Helplessness', which is well worth reading. It is called 'Learned Optimism'.

All this is to reinforce the role of the mind in healing. As a supplementary volume to A Course In Miracles puts it: '*All therapy is psychotherapy, since all healing involves the mind*'. ('Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process and Practice').

In the film 'A Beautiful Mind' starring Russell Crowe, the physicist's psychiatrist at one point quotes to him some powerful lines from Milton's Paradise Lost. When questioned how his patient could have come up with such real delusions. He says:

*The Mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven*

1667 Book 1.1.254

## **Non-local mind**

*The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger mind of which the individual mind is only a sub-system.*

Steps To An Ecology of Mind Gregory Bateson pp 436

The Mind in a more universal sense is by no means confined to our ego-mind, personality and character. It can be seen as spanning the whole intermediary realm between the human spirit and the human body (the physical, the non-physical and the metaphysical).

One could describe the role of the mind as a lens, concentrating energy into matter. The power of that lens will depend on the direction in which the mind is orientated and how clear it is. This is where a plethora of more metaphysically-orientated books and workshops come in, talking about Soul-Contracts, Life Purposes, Soul Paths etc. and the various angelic and guide supports that are available to uphold and help realise our soul destinies. (Dan Millman: 'The Life You Were Born To Live, Adrienne Rich: 'Discovering Your Life Purpose', Carolyn Myss: Sacred Contracts').

These deal with the issue of 'where is your mind focussed? From where does it receive its grounding and support? Purely from the visible and material world or beyond this to a more fundamental non-visible reality?'

Within this, books and workshops emphasise 'The Power of Positive Thinking' focus on 'how is your mind focussed? Indeed, is it focussed at all, or is there a need for mental discipline and mental re-training?'

## **Meditation**

*Meditation is bringing the mind back home, and this is first achieved through the practice of mindfulness...The gift of learning to meditate is the greatest gift you can give yourself in this life...Meditation is the road to enlightenment.*

The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying: Sogyal Rinpoche pp 61 & 57

Many people have no idea about the state of their minds. We have not been taught to look inwardly. In a compulsively active world, the willingness to be still and to remain quiet and inactive in order to observe the contents of one's own mind is seen as esoteric nonsense and highly suspect. The result is a world gone more than slightly mad.

Buddhist meditators regard the untrained mind as flea-like or monkey-like in its incessant hopping around from thought to thought. A brief observation of how our minds customarily function will reveal that of the 50,000 or so thoughts that present themselves daily to our minds, most are repetitious, purposeless and redundant. The vast bulk are simply the massive inertia effect of our past conditioning and contain nothing that is spontaneous, original or immediately relevant to the present moment at all.

'A Course in Miracles' describes our normal mental situation in the following words, '*you are far too tolerant of mind-wandering and are passively condoning your mind's mis-creations*'. Even more forthrightly, in Neale Donald Walsche's 'Conversations With God', *you are all mental lepers. Your minds are eaten away with negative thoughts*.

The various ways of learning to meditate are, in their initial stages, geared towards what Buddhists call 'mental calming or calm abiding'. Under such conditions, of quietly, inactively observing (witnessing) the contents of our own mind, negative contents can naturally release and begin to clear themselves. The analogy is often given that it is more difficult to see a clear image of the world in the surface of a lake that is ruffled and rippling than it is in a calm, clear surface.

Beyond this stage, however, there are terrains of Mind (Universal Mind/ Non-Local Mind) termed in Buddhism as 'Greater Awakening'. These tend to become the province of more esoteric spiritual practice, although some people can spontaneously reach them through deep relaxation (Autogenic Training (AT), Transcendental Meditation (TM) etc.).

## Relaxation and self-healing

*The soul that worries is out of harmony already*

Philosophy of Silver Birch pp 130

Passive relaxation methods activate what Herbert Benson MD refers to as '**the relaxation response**'. This effectively allows bodily systems the rest and respite to re-adjust themselves and begin a process of re-correction that can lead to full self-healing.

What has been learned from various cases of **spontaneous recovery** from seemingly **incurable** conditions is that the body seems to have its own self-healing intelligence which re-activates when circumstances allow. These include the various methods of bringing about a state of relaxation and actively unburdening the mind of its cargo of negative thoughts.

## Beliefs

*Those can who believe they can. Your faith has made you well.*

The Holy Bible: Matthew 9:22

It will be clear from what has been said that the mind has a very significant role to play in healing and the recovery from illness, as also in the

creation of illness and non-recovery. It is by no means a coincidence that the injunction of the ancient Asclepian healing temples reads 'Know Thyself'.

As well as the mind being swayed by the nature of its thoughts, it is also swayed by the beliefs we choose to adopt about ourselves, life, our place in the scheme of things etc. Our beliefs are a matter of choice and are open to revision according to our learning and experience. This includes our beliefs about **everything** (ourselves our parents, work, God, the Universe, etc).

People do die out of loyalty to their beliefs, which override the biological organism's basic instinct to survive at all costs and can lead to desperate acts and the creation of life-threatening conditions. Beliefs are very powerful, especially when collectively held and kept isolated from any interaction with contrasting beliefs. Beliefs can easily become addictive, undermine relationships, control our perceptions and expectations and severely limit our potential.

On the other hand, our beliefs can liberate us. If we are indeed free to choose our beliefs, then do we choose beliefs that serve us or that limit us? The more recent methods of present-orientated brief psychotherapies (CBT, NLP) also deal with belief structures and their effects and seek ways with the client to negotiate changes of belief where beliefs held are self-limiting.

## **The body-mind interface**

*Man's diseases are psychosomatic, which means they begin in the mind and the spirit*

Philosophy of Silver Birch pp 123

We have dealt with the wider, non-physical context which forms the backcloth to the healing journey. There is also the matter of whether an individual seeking fundamental healing finds themselves in a social network which believes or disbelieves in the wider possibilities of healing. In the end, a person engaged in the task of radical healing may find that they have to disengage themselves from the belief systems of all those around them in order to find within themselves some strength which allows them *to do what has not been done before*. (The equivalent in healing terms of Roger Bannister first breaking the 4-minute mile barrier). This involves not only an engagement of will and determination, but also the finding of sources of courage and encouragement.

All this relates to events taking place in the immeasurable non-visible dimensions before events even begin to register as symptoms in the body.

Beginning from the 'outside-in' (rather than the medical model's usual way of progressing from the inside-out), the forms of healing can generally be grouped in the following ways:

## **Healers**

Some healers are able to work at a distance (absent healing or distant healing) through the intervention of thought and prayer to effect change in the bodily, emotional and psychological condition of others. This phenomenon is

described in a book by Larry Dossey called 'Prayer is Good Medicine'. It does not require a high degree of spiritual attainment or virtue; it is a function of the nature of continuous energy fields and the power of positive intention. As the biologist Rupert Sheldrake makes clear, it is likely that these extra-sensory communications are exchanged between us far more than we realise. In his book 'Quantum Healing', Deepak Chopra remarks on a rather unusual situation where a collective meditation taking place in a meditation hall was shown to influence the urine samples of people passing by outside the hall! The subtlety, complexity and pervasiveness of these influences are described by Candace Pert in 'Molecules of Emotion'.

Other healers work through the aura, the human energy field interpenetrating and immediately surrounding the physical body. Although this can at times appear a little flamboyant, what is occurring is that the healer is acting as an instrument or conduit to focus energies towards the body which, when they can be absorbed, will help counterbalance whatever imbalances are occurring. Although there are often spiritual influences and spiritual intelligences involved in this, there is also a sort of natural osmosis (a focussing of energy such that there is a movement from a greater concentration to a lesser concentration until they equalise). At a natural level the process affects psychological, emotional and physical levels of functioning due to two often stated principles: 'energy follows thought' and 'energy goes where it is needed'.

The 'laying-on-of hands' also known as contact healing, brings the healers hands into contact with the healing recipient's body (lightly and appropriately). It is conducted fully clothed and without making contact with intimate body areas. Sensations vary and results in part depend on whether a person can maintain openness (even a sceptical openness) towards this form of influence.

With spiritual healing there tends to be a less specific symptom-orientated approach than with the more medically orientated therapies. Extraordinary healings do occur and this form of healing has also been shown to be of considerable benefit in stress and pain relief and post-operative recoveries. The spiritually orientated practitioner would tend to acknowledge that each person has their 'healing guides' and 'protective presences' and that energies are moved by love and healing intent through the knowledge possessed by this wider healing intelligence (wisdom motivated by love). Divine power and human love are mediated in this way through the aura by the individual's spiritual support group. The actual mechanics of this are as simple as a mother instinctively placing her hand with healing intent on her child's hurt knee.

Spiritualist Organisations such as the Spiritualists' National Union (SNU) would tend to heal in this way. The National Federation of Spiritual Healers (NFSH) operates without spiritualist governing principles. Modalities like Reiki and Vortex Healing, EMF balancing etc are intermediaries on a spectrum that extends to Therapeutic Touch, which has been developed by the nursing profession and is widely used in the USA.

## **Body therapies**

Some body-workers are also natural healers. Orthodox medicine is increasingly recognising the therapeutic benefits of the various forms of massage in stimulating, invigorating, clearing and re-aligning the body. Similarly, osteopathy, acupuncture and medical herbalism as well as homeopathy and reflexology have all begun to establish regular positions as complementary therapies alongside scientific medicine in the carrying out of its tasks.

The human neuro-endocrine system is extremely sensitive both to manipulation work (cranio-sacral osteopathy, manual-lymphatic drainage etc.) and to remedies which have a psycho-active and emotional effect (Bach and Australian Bush Flower Remedies).

Eastern forms of therapy describe Chi or Qi energy and its circulation to the bodily organs through the various meridian pathways. It is this flow of energy which can be enhanced by self-directed forms of exercise (Tai Chi and Qigong) and by a range of oriental therapies such as acupuncture, acupressure, shiatsu etc. Methods like these work closer to the body's electromagnetic field, which could be regarded as the close organising energy system of the body.

There are two recently emerging perspectives of 'whole body medicine' that have evolved from within the medical perspective. The first, arising in the 1980s was Psycho-Neuro-Immunology (PNI) developed by Elliot Dacher. More recently, since 2001 this has evolved into Psycho-Neuro-Endocrino-Immunology (PNEI).

These interdisciplinary fields of modern medicine are the offshoots of what was once called psycho-somatic medicine. It represents the body interface where the normally closed discipline of medicine is starting to meet the complementary therapies half-way. (Osteopathy, massage, acupuncture, homeopathy and herbalism are the preferred options to date).

However, there has been a traditional uneasiness between the 'hard science' of medicine and the so-called 'soft sciences' underlying many complementary practices. Where unforeseen cures have occurred through non-medical channels, they have often been dismissed as the result of 'spontaneous remission', 'suggestion' or 'the placebo response'. What exactly is involved in spontaneous self-healing is not clearly known.

## **The placebo response**

A placebo is a therapeutically inert substance (water, sugar, chalk etc) which when administered to a subject, who believes in its efficacy, is accompanied by inexplicable, sometimes life-saving benefits. These benefits are not seen to have anything to do with the properties of the substance but are associated with the patient's belief in its effectiveness.

A fascinating account of the famous placebo response is given in a book entitled 'The Holographic universe' by Michael Talbot. It involves a patient surnamed Wise, his psychologist, Bruno Klopfer and an anti-cancer drug called Krebiozen. Wise had end-stage cancer of the lymph nodes and had disseminated tumours 'the size of oranges' around his body. He appealed

to Klopfer to give him an incompletely tested drug recently released on the market called Krebiozen.

With reservations Klopfer did administer the drug, with astounding effects. Wise's condition rapidly receded and completely cleared within the course of a few days. As the account put it, 'his tumours melted like snowballs on a hot stove'. This was not the end of the story, however. Subsequently, Wise read in the media an account discrediting the efficacy of Krebiozen. The doubts expressed in the paper cast renewed doubts and despair in his own mind, his symptoms returned and Wise returned to Klopfer.

This time Klopfer acted differently. Confronted with Wise's obvious desperation, Klopfer suspected a placebo-effect to have been operative in Wise's original 'cure' and decided to work on this hypothesis. With scant regard for medical ethics, Klopfer told Wise that the original batch of Krebiozen had been corrupted and weakened. He had, however, acquired a more recent high potency batch which he was prepared to try if Wise wished. This time an injection of purified water was administered, with the same miraculous effects. The life-threatening condition completely reversed and receded.

Unfortunately, the story does not end there either. Subsequently Wise read a newspaper article definitively discrediting the influence of Krebiozen in the treatment of cancer. His beliefs were shattered and his faith collapsed. The condition returned and proved unreachable by any further means of medical influence. Wise died a couple of weeks later.

This account is illustrative of a number of things. Firstly, the already mentioned effect of the power of belief in influencing the human mind. Secondly, the susceptibility of our beliefs to the beliefs of others (especially those to whom we attribute expertise and authority). In 'Ageless Body, Timeless Mind', Deepak Chopra refers to this as 'the mass hypnosis of social conditioning'. A third point is raised by Michael Talbot himself when he questions the degree to which a placebo effect might also be present in a high proportion of normal medications administered by doctors.

What if a doctor's belief in the effectiveness of a drug influences the confidence and authority with which they interact with a patient? In this case, one is dealing with a placebo effect in the mind of the doctor, which subsequently transfers into the doctor-patient interaction.

There was a psychiatrist William Sargant who passionately believed in the use of Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) in the treatment of acute and suicidal forms of depression. He achieved impressive results with this method. One day a student accompanying him spoke up about another doctor who was also researching the effectiveness of ECT in the treatment of depression and was not producing such unequivocal results. Dr Sargant replied 'Ah, but you see, Dr ...does not *believe* in ECT!'

Clearly the placebo is not the mechanism for many drug-based (pharmacological) therapies. Immense strides have been made with all major diseases with synthetic drugs (allopathic medicines). However, there are variations in patient responsiveness to the different drugs and as well as switching drugs and changing drug regimes, some consideration needs to be given as to why these differences exist. Louis Pasteur was said to have recanted on his deathbed the theory that all illness was caused by the

incursion of pathological organisms, saying 'it is not the germ, it is the **soil** on which the germ falls'.

## **Symptoms**

It is as if, in dealing with already formed symptoms and in trying to prevent symptom formation, medical science and the complementary therapies are trying to dig the same tunnel from different ends.

In a sense, the production of symptoms can be viewed as the end point, the terminus of a pathological process, rather than its beginning. Orthodox medicine starts with the symptom. If no symptoms are yet in evidence, the condition is described as 'sub-clinical' and a period of further monitoring is undertaken until a condition makes a clinical appearance (or distress about a 'non-organic' condition is handed over to the psychiatrist).

## **Stress**

With the emergence of the concept of stress, medicine and the complementary therapies have been brought into closer alliance with one another. Everyone knows that stress can have a disruptive effect on the body. The effects of stress exert a heavy toll on the economy as well as individuals, and many complementary therapies have been able to cash in on a closer relationship with medicine because of the role they play in relaxation and stress reduction. In a Health Care System under siege, admittance will eventually be given to methods of stress reduction which put a less heavy toll on overburdened medical resources.

One of the reasons for writing this article is to emphasize that healing is not simply a matter of relaxation and recreation, but re-education and self-transformation. Preventive medicine is far more than a matter of incorporating an hour's 'down-time' each week as part of a chic lifestyle accessory.

Medical science has gradually come to recognise the wisdom of that deathbed confession of Pasteur's. In his book 'Re-Inventing Medicine', Larry Dossey talks about the first era of medicine (Era 1 Medicine) being exclusively dominated by the biological view of the body as a complex machine, seen independently of its environment. In Era 2 Medicine, there has come about a gradual recognition that the mind and emotions significantly influence disease proneness and the course of recovery. Dossey terms this mind-body medicine.

Dossey says that we are now moving into Era 3 Medicine, 'soul-body medicine', where spiritual factors are beginning to be investigated in terms of their impact on health. The situation is further advanced in America at present than it is in Europe, although initiatives are beginning to take place over here.

## **What are the essentials of a healing relationship?**

*The healer should so live his life that he attains the greatest pitch of attunement*

Philosophy of Silver Birch pp 134

The question of 'What is it that heals?' is not isolated. Healing is undergone with others and to a very significant degree healing cannot be segregated from the healing relationship (or relationships).

Hans Eysenck, the British psychologist, conducted a research trial concerning the effectiveness of various forms of psychotherapy as set against a control group receiving no treatment. He found that there was little appreciable difference in outcomes after two years. Where there was a difference, Eysenck felt that this had less to do with the specific methods of psychotherapy as with the rapport which individuals built up with their therapists. This to him was the principle therapeutic influence. Other terms for this form of understanding and empathy are 'the therapeutic alliance' or 'healing partnership'.

There seems to be a resonance which develops into rapport. In this way, symptom-orientated people will tend to go to doctors, nature-orientated people will tend to visit Naturopaths, Herbalists and Homeopaths and spiritually-orientated people will tend to consult spiritual healers. In a sense, there really is no need for rivalry, since most symptoms are very multi-dimensional and accessible through a variety of different approaches, sometimes in tandem where opportunity allows.

There are, however, some basic givens to what is essential in a healing relationship:

### **Confidentiality**

In our increasingly litigious compensation culture, the ultimate confidentiality of the Doctor/Therapist-Patient relationship no longer has the sacrosanct level of the confessional which it once had. In legal matters, for instance, regarding child abuse and intent to commit murder etc. this curb on the privacy of the therapeutic relationship is undoubtedly legitimate.

Nevertheless, the basic autonomy and integrity of the therapeutic setting is necessary for deeper therapeutic work to take place. The responsibility for this rests with the practitioner. S/he is responsible for the security and reliability of the therapeutic setting. S/he is its 'dynamic administrator'.

People often underestimate the role played in change by the therapeutic setting. We all read messages all the time from our environments at an intuitive level. Energetically, for deep communication to take place, a person needs to assess that the situation is safe and secure, that the person they are with is capable of maintaining it that way and that the practitioner themselves have time to listen and are capable of containing emotionally charged communications. This is where the practitioner's own meditative capacity comes in.

## **Genuineness**

The Client-Centred therapist, Carl Rogers, referred to the therapeutic importance of congruence or what might be thought of as genuineness or authenticity on the part of the practitioner. When an individual goes to visit a therapist, it is not just the therapist who is doing the assessing. The therapist too is being assessed. Is the therapist able to be themselves or are they locked into a role? How adept is the therapist interpersonally? Are they able to view the situation from the perspective of the client, or are they hidden behind their training and credentials?

The ability to be able to see things from multiple perspectives is one sign of a trained mind, a mind which has been able to detach enough to give up the need always to be right, but instead to understand and relate. Plato described this as the ability to be 'able to see differences in similarities and similarities in difference'. It is notoriously difficult to try to communicate with someone of fundamentalist temperament who is locked into a particular way of viewing things. It is far more helpful if the healing practitioner has developed a range of perspectives and is able to change bandwidths, as it were, to match the communication of the person who is with him or her.

## **Listening**

Without the ability not only to listen but to hear (deep listening), there is unlikely to be any basis for deep communication and fundamental change. Ours is an 'accelerated culture' in which things seem to be getting faster and the rate of information flow exceeds our ability to filter or make sense of it. One of the popular reasons given for seeking alternative systems of health is that individuals have much more time to talk, reflect and rest than their daily schedules allow them. Deep listening increases this sense of internal space from which a person who has been listened to then re-approaches the world. This is one reason why bartenders, hairdressers and other good listeners are at a premium in today's culture.

## **Containment**

Listening and containment really occur together. The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion explores this in detail in 'Learning From Experience'. He focuses on the fragmentary mental condition of the infant and the infant's need to 'throw out' (project) experiences which are negative and overwhelming. This is done onto the mother (more specifically, the mother's breast). Everything then depends on how the mother deals with the situation. If she receives the projection openly (in an attitude of 'reverie') then what the infant cannot deal with becomes contained and processed. The infant is enabled to retrieve the experience in a more tolerable form and bring it within the sphere of their own autonomy. Growth and development takes place.

If, however, the infant projects an intolerable experience and the caregiver panics and reacts, there is no containment and neutralising of the experience. The experience is refracted and simply comes back to the infant

'in bits'. This causes deeper panic and aversion, promotes a sense of greater insecurity and inhibits learning and the growth of autonomy.

This happens throughout life both in communication in intimate relationships and also at a societal level. One thinks of Winston Churchill's capacity, despite personal difficulties, to convey an image of calmness and assurance to the British people during the years of the Second World War.

A healing relationship similarly requires the presence of one who is free enough from turmoil to be able to receive and contain troubling communications from others. Otherwise there is reaction, non-containment and escalation of anxiety.

## **Humour**

*Where play is not possible, the task of the therapist is to bring the patient to a state of play*

D.W. Winnicott: Playing and reality

*My aim is to create a space in which the patient can experiment with their own nature*

C.G.Jung

Laughter is good medicine. In 'Anatomy of An Illness', Norman Cousins described how he cured himself of a life-threatening illness through an exclusive diet of humour from films, books and television. He laughed his way back into health. The condition returned subsequently and he re-applied the same treatment.

Humour requires ease, relaxation, lightness and versatility. It is necessary to maintaining a sense of perspective. The very serious minded tend to have little sense of proportion. (The 'exercise' of humour also releases endorphins and catecholamines which have a freeing and stimulating effect on bodily as well as mental processes).

It is, of course, helpful if your health practitioner is not a complete buffoon, but the ability to contrast lightness and depth is a distinct advantage!

## **Truth and humility**

*Truth is a thing so pure, so noble and beautiful, that if God and the truth were different, I would choose truth*

Meister Eckhart

*All that I know is that I know nothing at all*

Socrates

Truthfulness is, of course, related to congruence or genuineness. Truth is a rare commodity in our modern day world. We are assailed by smooth talking advertisers, marketing hype, political 'double-speak' and business double-dealing. Often people come to a therapeutic relationship with one or more deep experiences of personal betrayal behind them which they may not

have been able to overcome and release. The courage to speak simply and truthfully is the only effective antidote I can think of. Let your 'yes' mean 'yes' and your 'no' mean 'no'.

Humility is less commonly spoken about as a therapeutic necessity. The actual word is related to humus, meaning being close to the earth, having one's feet on the ground, being on an equal par with all others.

Ours is an age of the cult of the expert, in which we are encouraged repeatedly to abandon our own internal wisdom and intuition in deference to external specialists, experts and pundits. There is very little sense of humility about this and although only the smallest portion of life is in any way rationally explicable, we are generally given to believe that whereas we may feel full of grey areas, someone somewhere knows the answers.

Life is not really like this however. Often it is lived with the best intention and guidance we can muster in the face of uncertainty. Dealing with uncertainty is not what our educational systems equip us to do.

Much of deep therapeutic change is a kind of de-conditioning from all that we have been taught. This actually requires an ability not always to be right, and to be open to the possibility that there may be something you do not know, the knowing of which could make a decisive difference. Most major scientific breakthroughs have been made through a willingness to be wrong, to clear the decks and begin again with a new 'thought experiment', with as few assumptions and preconceptions as possible.

Listening and exploring, as opposed to debating, is based on the value of not knowing. Indeed, the willingness to let something new in is fundamental to our creativity and its expression. The poet Keats referred to it as 'negative capability':

*Negative capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable searching after fact and reason...being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge*

Letter to George and Thomas Keats 21.10.1817

## **Healing, life and death**

*Healing is a soul process, not a physical one....Diagnosis, too often is merely a physical assessment, whereas the root cause is to be found in the mind and the spirit...There are no instruments in your world which can measure soul growth and spiritual attainment...To achieve health you must have wholeness, harmony, rhythm, concert...Death is feared, but death is part of the natural law. Physical immortality is not the object of earthly existence.*

Philosophy of Silver Birch (pp 66, 73, 96)

Healing is a total (and a global) process. The end point is not the indefinite deferral of death. Instead, the inevitability of death for all biological organisms needs to be seen as part of an ongoing movement or cycle through birth and death which is uninterrupted and unending.

Healing may eventually be awakening to the experience that there is something essential within us 'beyond birth and death' and beginning progressively to live from within that space.

There is a time for everything and a season for all things under the sun. Sometimes, reaching new and lasting solutions takes time, with periods of pause in between. Paradoxically, despite the process of healing and learning being unending, perhaps this is the last element of healing and the healing relationship that requires mention – Time.

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