

Case Studies in Spiritual Healing

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Spiritual healing is more common than many consider. According to a Yanklevich study, close to 50% of Americans have experienced healing or significant improvement of a condition through prayer or meditation alone. Over 1000 clinical studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of prayer establishing the fact that those who pray or are prayed for do statistically better than those who do not; which is to say that those who pray for their health have fewer diseases, recover more rapidly when they are ill, and generally live longer lives.

The question to be asked is "Why?" To some this can be explained by the generally healthier life habits of the religious, to others it has to do with a body/mind connection that benefits from the relaxation response from prayer and meditation. But we could consider some other explanations through exploring some case studies.

Christian Scientists have practiced spiritual healing for over a century and a half. During that time close to 75,000 testimonies of healing have been published in the CS periodicals; they represent only a fraction of the healings testified to every week at Christian Science services. Since 1970 over 20,000 healings have been recorded in these periodicals, 80% of which have been physical healings and over a quarter of those have had some medical confirmation. The kinds of cases include malignancy, polio, tuberculosis, pneumonia, heart and kidney disorders, broken bones, meningitis, appendicitis, cataract, diabetes, blindness, multiple sclerosis, the type of ailments are practically endless.

Many of these healings have taken place quickly, some have required more effort, but all of them represent to those healed something more than mind over matter; they evidence a growing understanding of the divine laws that govern them, the divine Source of those laws and a subsequent realization about the nature and substance of life.

Raising some questions

Some years ago, a good deal of credence was given to a healing of an advanced stage of cancer. Alice Newton of Leavenworth Kansas appealed to Dr. Rebecca Beard, a physician who was also interested in spiritual healing. She asked help of Beard's prayer group in St. Louis, MO. Initially shocked by the size of the stomach tumor, the group agreed to pray for Newton. Returning home assured that her prayers would be answered., Newton continued with the group for two years. While the group sometimes faltered in their belief that prayer

would meet the case, Newton did not. Finally one night Newton had a vision during her sleep of helping Jesus during his crucifixion. Raising her hand to steady his body and ease the suffering; at that moment her hand dropped to her abdomen and she awoke. The abdomen was completely flat; there was no pain and the huge accumulation was gone. Interestingly there was no evidence that the mass had passed. A local doctor was called and questioned her: "What came away? Was there water? Was there blood? Did you perspire heavily?" Her answer was "No, nothing passed—nothing came away." She lost 38 pounds in that one experience; subsequent physical examination showed "every organ fresh and virginal as though [Newton] had never been ill." While the city of Leavenworth and the Kansas City Star would mention the healing each year on the anniversary of Newton's healing, no one ever seem to probe the obvious questions: what did the disappearance of that 38 pounds show about the nature of matter; what kind of law may be involved in such a healing; how does this relate to the role of faith in healing; what does it tell us about the nature of God? Those are the questions that should attend examples of spiritual healing; I would suggest that the far more fascinating exploration in spiritual healing lies in pushing our mental horizons about the very concept of reality.

Probing the questions raised by such healings was the life course of Mary Baker Eddy, the discoverer of the spiritual healing method practiced in Christian Science. Eddy is arguably the most prolific spiritual healer of modern times; her healing experiences with herself and others led to her writing her landmark book on healing entitled *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. This book is, in large part, a record of the lessons and techniques that she observed in her case practice. Her body of healing encompassed the full range of life experiences, but in all of them the ultimate goal was to learn more about the very nature and essence of life. Speaking of her own life search she wrote in her autobiography:

From my early childhood I was impelled, by a hunger and thirst after divine things,—a desire for something higher and better than matter, and apart from it,—to seek diligently for the knowledge of God as the one great and ever-present relief from human woe.

As miraculous as some of these case studies may appear, spiritual healing to Eddy was not a miracle; it was the result of divine law which when understood and practiced could bring dependable and consistent results. Elementary to this process of healing was what she called "individualizing infinite power," the process whereby human thought came into accord with divine intelligence and presence.

Individualizing spiritual power

When I was in college, my roommates and I went skiing during semester break at a rather remote resort in Montana; one morning early I was awakened by a pain so severe in my side that I could hardly get my breath, let alone think clearly. Turning immediately to prayer and declaring the presence of divine Love with me, I gained enough composure to wait for

my roommates to get up and start out for the day. I then called a friend of mine who was staying down the road and asked her to come over and help me. She also had experience in healing spiritually; I told her what was going on and she agreed to come right away. On her way over, she later told me, she was pretty fearful about whether she could help me, whether she would know what to say or how to pray. But she did begin praying for herself, knowing that the power of healing was not in her efforts but in aligning her thought with God's law and power. In a sense she prayed for the humility to see that healing was not about personal power but seeing the law of God operating, right where this daunting challenge was going on. When she entered my room I felt the result of her prayer; it was a calming presence. She read to me an idea out of Science and Health: "If Spirit or the power of divine Love bear witness to the truth, this is the ultimatum, the scientific way, and the healing is instantaneous."

In a sense this is what she had been realizing in her prayer for herself, and it was just the right idea to help me. The pain stopped; I fell asleep for a while and then awoke without any problem at all. We skied the rest of the day together. A few years later while taking a rather extensive physical exam, x-rays showed that I had suffered an appendicitis attack, and the attending physicians asked about the surgery performed. Looking at this healing, I learned a great deal about the need to understand just what the healing power is, that it is not through mere personal effort or ability but rather the capacity to "individualize infinite power," letting the very presence of divine intelligence and love be present as one's thought. Gaining the power of healing, it seems to me, has much to do with learning about humility and meekness.

Spiritual healing as an alterative

Spiritual healing is often characterized as an alternative method of healing; but the assumption that goes along with the term alternative is that it is another way of accomplishing the same thing. In this respect understanding spiritual healing as an alternative may be a misnomer. I think this kind of healing may better be understood as an alterative in the sense that what is really at its base is an altering or changing of thought and assumption. For instance if we go back to the questions raised about the nature of matter in Newton's case, we might ponder whether the nature of substance is really material at all. Perhaps we could consider substance more from a mental standpoint, that what we see as matter is not actually a physical phenomenon but a mental one. I think we would have to come to that conclusion when we recognize that in the healings recounted, the so-called physical condition didn't just improve by a change of thought, it entirely disappeared. What can account for the immediate disappearance of a 38 pound tumor if the nature of the tumor was not actually physical, although appearing so, but actually thought? In much of the exploration today regarding mind/body connection the assumption is that thought (mind) acts on matter (body) in ways that improve it and heal it; but that does not really explain Newton's experience. The tumor did not dissolve in some

materially explainable way; it simply disappeared suggesting that the very substance of that condition may be something entirely different than what is commonly assumed.

Some years ago I had a patient who contacted me with an AIDS related disease, Kaposi's sarcoma. He had been diagnosed with such and had come to the end of his rope with what treatment was available. While he had heard that Christian Science healers had dealt with some pretty challenging diseases, he had made up his mind that he was going to die and really came to talk about the nature of life and death and to gain more understanding about God. His story was compelling in that he had led a pretty remarkable life. Since he was thirteen he had lived on the streets and had become a victim to all sorts of addiction—alcohol, drugs, sex; eventually he contracted HIV and then AIDS. He told of feeling really fed up with all that sensuality promised and wanted a completely different sense of life. We talked about a passage in the Bible that referred to living "hid with Christ in God." I talked to him about the nature of God as being Life, Love, Spirit, Mind and not some anthropomorphic being that had feelings and a nature just like mortals. Living a life in God meant living the spiritual qualities and attributes that belong to God but are meant to be expressed by its creation. Each week we talked more about what those qualities were. At one point we talked about what true immunity was, that the immune system while commonly thought of in physical terms could be seen as a mental process, that one could scrutinize the quality of thought that was making up his consciousness and eliminate any thought that really could not be identified as expressive of the divine nature. We agreed that he would develop his mental immune system. It was not long before the symptoms simply disappeared. This was not really an alternative healing experience; it was an alterative healing experience; this fellow altered the way that he was viewing life, the way that he thought about the body, and the way that he thought about God. The mental transformation that occurred resulted in the healing.

Regenerating the individual

Healing is more and more being thought of as just not the improvement or alleviation of physical symptoms but the regeneration of the whole individual. This recognition appreciates that the intellectual, moral, and spiritual state of the patient is equally important to address as is the physical. A century ago Louis Pasteur and Claude Bernard debated what they termed the "terrain" of disease; Pasteur, of course, held that the microbe was the determining factor while Bernard held that the body's defenses, largely defined as the complete mental attitude of the patient, was of crucial importance. At the end of his life Pasteur reportedly said, "Bernard was right. The germ is nothing, the soil is everything." Spiritual healing cultivates this soil—the mental, moral and spiritual makeup of the individual—in an effort to meet the needs of the body. It often requires of patients a shift or change of base in the way that they are dealing with the issues of their lives.

One man I know came to that point in his life when he faced a diagnosis that required bypass surgery of the heart; this same man also suffered from chronic depression and diabetes. Remembering the challenges his father had as the result of bypass surgery, he was determined to find another way of dealing with his condition despite the persistent urgings of his physician. Confiding in one of his clients for whom he was doing remodeling work, he was offered a copy of Science and Health. For the next few months he studied the book, having time since he was now unable to work. He found a passage in this book that speaks about "the struggling heart;" it begins "Love enriches the nature, enlarging, purifying and elevating it." The passage continues, addressing the need to sever the "fleshly ties [which] serves to unite thought more closely to God" thus supporting the "struggling heart." He knew that his heart was struggling both literally and figuratively and that he needed to enrich his nature by challenging some of the physical or material assumptions he held about himself. Turning thought more closely to God; he said that during the time that followed he achieved "a level of peace and happiness that I didn't know existed."

One day he decided to seek the help of a Christian Science practitioner which is how he ended up in my office. We talked about what the motive of healing should be (spiritual regeneration) and the process (living the new spiritual outlooks one is receiving) and the goal (having a life transformed, a soil, so to speak regenerated into productive and fulfilling approaches). When he got up to leave, I knew that he was healed and told him so. He doubted that observation at first, but when walking back to his car which was parked several blocks up a hill, he had no shortness of breath. When he got home he checked his blood sugar level and it was normal for the first time in seven years. The depressions came no more and some months later when he ran into his physician on the street and told him what had happened, the physician asked him if he would submit to another series of tests. He agreed and the results of the test showed, according to the doctor "your arteries are as clear as a newborn baby's."

Spiritual healing may seem a miraculous process to many, so unconventional by today's medical approaches. But the simple fact that lies behind spiritual healing is that people are essentially spiritual entities and must be addressed as something more than physical objects. The spiritual, moral, and intellectual aspects of individuals are far more determining than is now imagined. As we grow to appreciate just what makes up the individuality of people, we shall become more solicitous of that makeup and turn to it to evaluate prospects of true health. Eddy offers an insightful observation about the healing process in this age:

Spiritual causation is the one question to be considered, for more than all others spiritual causation relates to human progress. The age seems ready to approach this subject, to ponder somewhat the supremacy of Spirit, and at least touch the hem of Truth's garment.

