

Nature of Healing

A study of healing paradigms prepared for students of healing everywhere

by Kevin Patrick Baiko, M.D.

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Introduction: A Question of Responsibility

As an holistic health educator, I am often greeted by a question of responsibility. Is it responsible to provide modalities of healing which have not been thoroughly validated by science, especially when there already exist modalities which have been well substantiated? There are, of course, many ways to answer this question. One could talk about the limitations of the scientific process or the roles that capitalism and consumerism play in research and development of healing modalities. Or one could describe the relative lack of appreciation within the medical community for the spiritual aspects of healing and for the harmony inherent to nature. Or one could argue for the individual's autonomous right to take responsibility for his own health care and choose the healing modalities which suit him best. Indeed, the reasons to consider alternatives to the conventional health care model are great in number and compelling in nature, but perhaps the most compelling response is to turn the question back on those who ask it. Is it responsible to provide any modality of healing without a unified definition of what healing really is? Without such a definition, it would seem that there is no true standard to measure the process of healing and efficacy of any healing endeavor, regardless of scientific validation. If a healer, conventional or otherwise, cannot define the healing process in its most fundamental form, how can she really claim to know what she's doing? It seems that the most responsible thing that anyone could do is to strive to understand how one's actions affect himself and his fellow man.

To be fair, most health care practitioners, when asked, truly care for the well-being of their fellows and earnestly work to increase their knowledge base and skills to provide optimal service. However, when confronted with information that challenges the model of healing they were taught, most healers attempt to discount the challenge and explain it in more familiar terms. While this may be a natural human response to paradigmatic challenge, it unfortunately results in a missed opportunity to reevaluate the healing models in question with an open mind. Furthermore, it leads one to question if such models are guided more by a sense of social convention than by a motivation to bring about as much healing as possible.

Is it responsible to participate in healing endeavors which are considered questionable by popular opinion? This is a concern raised often by health care professionals, especially when alternatives to conventional therapies are suggested to treat potentially life threatening illnesses. Once again, the question of intent must be raised. What exactly is the goal of health care? No doubt there is a place in the world for conventional medicine, especially if one's goal is to keep bodies alive at all cost, and such costs are high. However, most people do have a cost threshold, for there are many other factors that are important to people, such as quality of life, self reliance, autonomy, harmony with nature, and so on. The greatest appeal to many alternative health approaches is that they address these concerns, usually better than conventional approaches. If such increasingly popular endeavors do challenge convention, I must ask - is it responsible not to explore them? If responsibility is in question, it seems imperative to define healing fully before participating in any health care modality.

This text is an exploration into the nature of healing. Its purpose is to model a philosophical process of exploration, not so much with the intent to define fundamental Truth, but rather to inspire all who would call themselves healers to seek a process to define healing for themselves, beyond and despite personal and conventional beliefs, customs, dogmas, theories, practices and mores. Such a process requires great flexibility of mind. This is a challenge in many ways, especially for the inflexible. As fate would have it, inflexibility seems well entrenched in what may be called today's health care system. There are, of course, many arguable explanations for this (institutional, economic, political, legal, social, karmic, etc.) Regardless, whether motivated by love or fear, most health care

providers are encouraged by the system that trained them to be guarded about what they accept as truth, especially when faced with challenges to the line of thinking in which they were trained, which is usually measured by some scientific standard. It should be of no surprise when members of our health care system argue that changes to the system can only be made manifest from within the system itself, implying that unconventional approaches to healing must be judged by standard scientific methods before they can be responsibly incorporated.

While most scientists, if provided with scientific backing, claim open-mindedness to a change of thought, how many consider the great potential for inflexibility within the scientific process itself? This isn't to suggest that science is flawed. The scientific process is a noble process of creating models of reality to better realize truth. Yet science is a tool limited by the mind using it. While the value of many alternative healing arts is slowly but surely being verified by strict scientific standards, such standards inherently fail to recognize the full value of such healing arts, while entirely failing to recognize the value of others. If it is accepted that the holistic healing arts do have value which conventional research fails to recognize, almost by design, then it is obvious that fundamental truths will be missed if one limits such an exploration to the inflexible boundaries of convention.

The obvious solution is to not limit one's thinking to the definitions of healing provided by convention, but rather seek a more personally meaningful definition, preferably one that is inclusive, for the more inclusive a definition is, the less likely it is to alienate others. Furthermore, by inclusively considering oneself as an integral part of the system, the student empowers herself to change the system from within, regardless of how foreign her ideas or healing endeavors may seem to others. While our world's conventional health care system does have capacity to change, its motivations to knock upon, or to even approach, the door of healing truths appear wanting and, no doubt, distracted. Clearly, if the student of healing is to earnestly explore its nature, he must be willing to liberate himself from the guarded and controlled halls of convention and even from the power tools of science, taking with him only his desire to discover truth, no matter how irrational it may appear to himself or the rest of his world. She must be willing to define elements of healing for herself and thereby take ownership of her language, even if such definitions are considered to be at odds with conventional terminology. This is not an easy passage. How often have vanguard thinkers been frustrated in their attempts to share their unconventional insights with colleagues who hold themselves to an external standard like the scientific process! One can no more convince a scientist without citing scientific evidence than one can change a fundamentalist's mind without citing his holy text. However, by taking personal ownership for one's sense of reality and the language used to describe it, the student creates a welcoming precedent for others to do the same (and on their own terms.)

While this exploration challenges the student to liberate herself from any limitation that conventional thinking may facilitate, it by no means suggests a deconstructive abandonment of the wealth of information heretofore gathered on the subject of healing. The quest for health is a given reality on Earth, and many approaches to this end have been proposed and utilized - apparently with varied success. It would seem irresponsible for the student to develop a personalized definition of healing without first acquainting herself with the rich variety of definitions already in circulation. Once adequately surveyed, no model of truth should be considered more sacred than the underlying truth itself. Perhaps the mysteries of healing defy definition and in the end invite their students to do the same. Regardless, the more flexibly one earnestly explores the nature of healing, the more capable he will be to responsibly participate in a world where healing happens.

Chapter 1: What is Healing?

What is Healing? What is its nature? Health Care is a familiar phrase, to say the least, but what does it mean to care for one's health? What is it that so many people seek for themselves and that so many aim to facilitate? And if facilitated, what exactly is being done? This question seems extremely relevant, particularly to those who claim to participate in the healing process of others, for while healing does not appear to necessitate any kind of understanding of what's taking place, it would follow that the more precisely it is defined, the more effectively it can be rendered.

Arguably, without an accurate understanding of healing, a healer runs the risk of not only failing at his task, but also of doing harm. Historical examples of such unfortunate events have no doubt occurred in every culture on Earth, not the least of which Western Civilization. One only has to recall the turn-of-the-century discovery that hand washing after autopsy greatly reduced peri-partum maternal mortality to recognize the role ignorance can play in health care. And one only has to consider the many bodies being artificially sustained today by high technological means to realize the moral implications involved in medical decision making. Given all the drugs, surgeries and lifestyle recommendations prescribed today with all their symptomatic effects ranging from subtle to severe, the question remains, What good is it all? Without a definition of healing, we have no means to assess the value of any healing endeavor.

It is also risky to rely exclusively on any one definition. Approaches to healing can vary enormously, sometimes complementing and other times contradicting each other. Some of these approaches come from ancient and foreign traditions, whose appreciation of the healing process and language used to describe it seem nearly irreconcilable with that of modern traditions. Other approaches have developed in parallel with conventional health care systems and employ means of healing from an alternative perspectives which employ means of healing that differ greatly from the standard approach. And the healer should never forget the perspective of the person and community with which she practices her art, for if anything is clear with regards to healing, it is that patient beliefs, attitudes and confidence greatly influence healing outcomes. To rely on one definition of healing is to risk the alienation of patient groups and fellow practitioners alike, but also to risk the oversight of potentially superior healing modalities described in other traditions.

It is clear that there are many efficacious paths to healing. Alternative approaches seem to work, often where conventional approaches fail, and often based on principles completely at odds with mainstream thinking. Of course, modern medicine has certainly changed the face of this world and deserves its credit. The life-sustaining measures which have emerged in this last century alone have prolonged countless lives across all age groups, completely shifting the make-up of this planets population. However, while remedies for nearly every form of suffering have become available through technology not available (or at least as presumed by conventional thinking) in any other age, the fact remains that alternative schools of healing also offer their own effective solutions. It therefore seems prudent to consider the widest range of healing approaches available when formulating a definition of healing, for ideally all manners of healing should be inclusively explained by this definition. The challenges that such considerations pose should pave the way to a definition of healing in its most fundamental form. While a universal definition of healing could offer great rewards to humanity, the process of reconciling the countless approaches found in the world carries with it an inherent risk of oversimplification. The range of healing practices that humans have developed includes common sense as well as the bizarre and exotic, and in many cases it is the inconsistencies within these approaches which set them apart as unique and effective.

The challenges that non-conventional approaches to healing pose to current medical thought are great and many, and not merely a matter of translation. As is often the case, the very precepts which direct alternative therapies may contradict the precepts governing conventional care. For example, a condition described as disease (a negative connotation) by an Allopathic physician may be described as a healing crisis (a positive connotation) by a Naturopathic physician. The vast discrepancy between these assessments naturally implies that the two physicians will approach this condition in very different ways. The process of reconciling the various approaches to health care is therefore a complete transformational process, in which discrepancies are seen as incentives to reformulate the definition of healing, so that it is all inclusive.

Discrepancies do not only exist between conventional and alternative health care practices. One of the most relevant challenges to current medical thought is that which has been called the placebo response. Simply stated, a placebo is an intervention which is supposed to have no effect, but which, in actuality, does. Take, for example, an hypothetical study in which ten men with the same diagnosed disease are given pills which, they are told, may elicit a certain effect. However, unbeknownst to the men in the study, only half is given pills with the active compound, while the other half is given pills with a presumably inert compound. Subsequently, four of the five men given the active compound elicit the response, while two of the five given the inert compound elicit the same response. Obviously, the substance under study demonstrates effectiveness on most of the men who took it, but what of the two men who were seemingly effected in similar fashion, despite not having taken the effective compound? And what of the one man who took the active compound yet failed to elicit the response? These questions have frustrated many researchers, who often look upon the placebo response as an inconvenient anomaly. In truth, such results suggest that there exists an unnamed underlying process by which some, if not all, of the men were influenced, regardless of the properties of the pills, that influenced the study's outcome. What could that underlying process be? Could this placebo response phenomenon, which continually challenges scientific thought, hold the key to understanding healing better?

Such questions challenge one to transform her world view so as to accommodate all observed phenomena and reconcile all observed discrepancies. Such a transformation should theoretically result in the creation of a new paradigm through which the nature of healing can be examined and defined in the most accurate terms humanly possible.

Chapter 2: Creating a New Paradigm

A paradigm is a cosmology, or world view, which not only defines the nature of the universe, but also our nature and relationship to the universe. As a model of reality, a paradigm establishes a framework by which

phenomena can be explained in internally consistent terms. Ideally, within this rubric the nature of all things, including the process of healing, can be truthfully understood, so that its principles may be applied in a meaningful sense by both individual and society. Of course, it is the paradigms of individuals, however contradicting, which define the paradigms embraced by their society, and although the factors influencing societal paradigms are complex and no doubt worthy of further examination, it is the intent of this text to empower the individual with the means to create a paradigm that meets the ideals stated above.

It is the nature of all paradigms to be changed as the perspective of those people using them change. Usually such changes are gradual, appearing as subtle refinements, in response to old discrepancies or newly observed anomalies within the paradigm at hand. Occasionally paradigmatic changes can be revolutionary, completely redefining the way an individual and even a society views the universe. Historically, the more profound the proposed change is, the more it is met with resistance by those subscribing to its predecessor, and obviously societal paradigmatic shifts are slow in process. Curiously, it is the scientists, those seekers of truth dedicated to developing the details within a given paradigm, who tend to be the most resistant to such changes. Fortunately, not all thinkers, nor scientists, are so closed in perspective, for a paradigmatic shift requires the ability to see beyond the parameters of the paradigm at hand so that a new, more useful, more inclusive paradigm may be created. But how does one develop a new paradigm?

To create a paradigm, a few fundamentals must be established. It is first necessary to establish its means of development. Since a paradigm is supposed to model truth, its creator must define how truth is to be obtained. Once this means is established, the fundamental precepts of the paradigm can be formulated and refined. These basic precepts should, in turn, form the framework on which the entire paradigm rests, and it is therefore imperative to contemplate these thoroughly to ensure that there is no internal inconsistency. Once outlined, these precepts should render one the capacity to describe and understand the full scope of reality, from the most universal to the most personal, and enable one to define the nature of all things.

But how is truth obtained? Man has asked this question throughout recorded history and probably long before, and (sidestepping the existential notion that there is no such thing as truth,) two general approaches have developed. These are best known as the subjective and objective approaches.

Using the subjective approach, the individual uses her self as a reference to understand all things. She considers one or more of the internal faculties, mental, intuitive and spiritual, to be the valid means to obtain truthful knowledge. This information may come from pure rational thought, spiritual revelation or merely a hunch. Paradigms which rely most heavily on this approach include the Spirit-Centered models of healing. Critics of this approach question the ability of any individual to intrinsically know truth better than anybody else, especially if she, as is often the case, is unable to externally demonstrate her subjective experience.

On the other hand, using the objective approach, the individual uses his environment as a reference to understand all things, including his own nature. He deems the external faculties of perception and experience to be the valid means to know truth. This information comes through the senses, both organic and by proxy of technology, where it is then analyzed by a scientific method so that a consistent frame of reference can be crafted. Paradigms which rely most heavily on this empiric approach include the current conventional model of healing. Critics of this approach question the reliance on the scientific process, which is inherently limited by the accuracy of the senses (and technology) and the questions posed to them.

While these two approaches appear to be opposite by definition, in truth, it is difficult to find any paradigm that hasnt been crafted through a combination of the two. Most if not all traditions of healing have evolved through a process of trial and error, and these objective experiences have shaped all systems of health care in their own cultural and practical contexts. As social beings we are inherently called to communicate our subjective experiences to each other in the hope that a common frame of reference be made, and the motivation to demonstrate this consistency to the senses is one that appears universal to all societies. By the same token, subjective experience is necessary for any paradigm of healing to develop, regardless of how grounded it is in the processes of empiricism. We are, of course, always operating from our own individual frame of reference, no matter how common that frame of reference appears, and the greatest discoveries in history have their source in revelations which clearly extended beyond a common frame of reference, often being reported as intuitive or divinely revelatory. So these two principles could be described as complementary opposites with the capacity to refine and qualify each other. It is therefore important to consider the relative roles that subjectivity and objectivity will play in the establishment of what is to be considered true, for this balance determines the very nature of the precepts that in turn define a paradigm.

While shaped by their method of development, these precepts can take any form, from the most self-centered to the most self-denying, from the most common to the most bizarre, but it is most important that they be consistent with each other and all that is based upon them. Ideally, these basic precepts should hold true without exception. For example, if one states that mankind's nature is good, then it holds that it is always good. If one defines

herself in biophysiologic terms, then it holds that her soul can only be defined in such terms as well. If one states that all human experience is a result of Karma, then he should be able to explain all human experience in terms of this law of cause and effect. With this principle in mind, we can begin to define our own nature, which is to define both practitioner and recipient of healing alike.

Defining ourselves is especially relevant to the definition of healing, for self is its object. Something about ourselves is effected when we experience healing. What is the nature of self and what are its parameters? Perhaps the most profound question one can ever ask is Who am I? Here is a question which has thoroughly engaged theologian and philosopher, mystic and scientist through the ages. To answer that question is to define the point which gives reference to the sphere of this universe which surrounds us. It seems vitally important to first establish a definition of self in its most fundamental and whole form, for anywhere short of this necessarily limits our understanding of its healing in entirety. If, for example, one defines self in terms of mere physical matter, healing will necessarily be measured by physical response to intervention. Whereas if one defines self as having physical, mental and spiritual components, it would follow that healing could occur at any one of these levels, if not all at once. And where does oneself end and the next begin? Can one heal in isolation or is another person, or even the whole community to which she belongs, required to heal in synchrony? Only when a whole and most fundamental sense of self is established can one define its relationship with healing and thereby define healing.

Just as a whole sense of self is necessary to define the parameters of that which is being healed, a whole sense of healing is required to define the parameters of its process on the self. If healing can be said to be a process, what are its boundaries? If health is its endpoint, what is the nature of health, and if disease is anywhere short of this endpoint, what is its nature? In other words, when we speak of sickness and health, what are we talking about? To answer this question is, of course to define healing, and it seems appropriate at this point to examine a range of healing paradigms, so that our parameters which define healing can be as universal as possible.

In this quest it would obviously be ideal to exhaustively review all world healing traditions, past and present. Such an endeavor, though certainly noble if not incredible, goes beyond the scope of this work. In any comparative study it is useful to develop general categories by which the subjects in question can be organized and examined, so that their salient features may be appreciated and applied to form a greater, more universal understanding. Therefore, this study frames the subject of healing paradigms by the principles which seem to govern their development and application. This approach inherently runs the risk of neglecting terrain which may be deemed relevant and/or including features which the reader may find irrelevant, and so the author can only humbly remind the reader that it is not the aim of this text to proclaim truth with regards to the nature of healing, but rather to provide a process through which the reader may develop a personal sense of truth.

The following chapters are therefore organized by general principles of healing perspectives, namely the Spirit-centered, Microcosmic and Mechanistic Models. These categories are, of course, the authors invention, and are offered as a means of comparison, however crude or subjectively insulting such general categories may appear to scholar and practitioner. Furthermore, these categories are by no means mutually exclusive, nor are they intended to be, for the development of an inclusive perspective is goal of this study. The book concludes with brief guidance of how one might apply the general principles in this discussion to develop a more universal and personal understanding of the nature of healing.

Chapter 3: Spirit Centered Paradigms

In our survey of healing paradigms, it is appropriate to start with the Spirit centered models. This grouping of cosmologies, while certainly encompassing an incredible range of traditions, represents the oldest known models of the universe, and as such, lends to form an historical framework in which one can understand subsequent and contemporary paradigms of healing. Though paradigms emphasizing the prime healing role played by spiritual forces, including Human Spirit itself, have surfaced in modern times, they invariably mirror preexistent practices and religious perspectives. Living in lands with technology far less developed (or at least by conventional standards), ancient healers were compelled to develop and refine the technology at hand, namely the faculties of the human body, mind and spirit, as their means to understand the world around them and apply its principles to healing. With such culturally and individually subjective origins, such systems of healing have taken many forms throughout world history, and yet while their origins often remain obscure, their tendency to appear and reappear, often in remarkably similar ways, speaks of their durability and appeal to be considered as valid and objective means to understand the healing process.

The nature of this category is necessarily mysterious. In fact, the modern health practitioner may regard it as rather archaic. However, such lack of appreciation for traditions of healing which embrace the mysteries of Spirit, though certainly not uncommon, betrays an unscientific mind. All sciences, both speculative and practical, must

continually deal with the unknown, and denial of the mysteries inherent to any field of study suggests an ignorance of ignorance itself. Of course, ignorance is a tendency inherent to being human, and history reminds us of the remarkable capacity for individuals and civilizations to be dogmatic, superstitious and censoring. This text therefore calls the reader to embrace the Socratic admission that the one fact we do know is that we don't know all facts. From this humble perspective the unknown calls to be investigated with only the limitation of the faculties available to us, just as it did to our ancient predecessors, who came to view the universe as being governed by supernatural forces, or forces beyond common physical understanding, and therefore in the realm of Spirit.

To describe the development of paradigms which center on the notion that Divine or supernatural forces influence or even govern life and healing is, of course, to describe the development of religions. Therefore, this survey explores, in a most general fashion, both indigenous and major world religious traditions to illustrate the principles of healing as seen from a Spirit-centered context. Although the general topic of religion encompasses world history and prehistory in origin, manifesting in uncountable descriptions and explanations of both physical and spiritual phenomena, common principles nevertheless exist with regards to the nature of healing. This common ground shared by a vast array religious traditions, which were in some cases isolated from each other by oceans for millennia, suggests that these traditions were utilizing universally applicable principles of healing. Just as the nearly universal existence of flood myths suggests that such an event is probably not so mythical after all, the commonality among spirit-centered paradigms suggests that certain principles had been discovered that were practical to healing and therefore somehow truthful in nature.

This principle of universal applicability is clearly evident in even the most indigenous cultures, whose healing perspectives can be described under the broad and perhaps simplistic category of the Shamanic Paradigm. The word shaman, coming from the Tungus tribe of Siberia, translates as one who can see in the dark, implying that the healer is an intermediary between the physical world of common experience and the unseen spiritual world. In these traditions, humans are considered to be spiritual entities taking form in a physical world. While these spiritual realms are imperceivable by most, the physical world is seen, at least to some extent, to be dependent upon events that transpire in these unseen realms. Physical health is a function of spiritual health, which is attributed, at least in part if not entirely, to the benevolent aid of deities, spirit-guides and power animals, which give strength and guidance to the individual. Disease is seen as a manifestation of spiritual punishment, the reflection of a malefic spiritual affliction or invasion which the individual cannot withstand alone. With such a perspective, respect and honor to these spiritual forces in the form of ritual become extremely important, as does the presence of one who specializes in remedying these spiritual causes of disease.

Spiritual remedies are made possible by the shaman's ability to access the spirit world and her knowledge of what to do once there. The use of ritual to enter the spirit world is universal, and whether the shaman uses dancing, chanting, drumming, mind altering substances or some combination thereof, these rituals seem to facilitate an altered state of consciousness, wherein the shaman perceives and interacts with a world of non-ordinary reality with non-ordinary entities and non-ordinary geography. Once there, the shaman may ask his power animal to diagnose his subject or perhaps rely on the symbolism experienced in this shamanic journey to propose a means to remedy the affliction. Although some shamans do all their healing work within this state of consciousness, most then take this information back to ordinary reality and, in the context of ritual, perform an act that either strengthens or expels the spirit in question. Typically, these acts involve the use of herbs, themselves seen to have spiritual qualities, or gestures that somehow outwardly depict the interaction between the shaman, the subject and the spirits involved.

Similarly, the cosmopolitan religious traditions have generally viewed disease as punishment, which may be atoned for spiritually. Most religions attribute human suffering to human sin. While health is seen as a blessing from a god or pantheon of gods, disease is seen to be a punishment for not abiding the laws of divine order. Some traditions, such as Hinduism, describe the physical world, with all its bruises and emotional turmoils, as a manifestation of a lack of self-realization of one's true spiritual nature. The Judeo-Christian image of the serpent that descends the tree of knowledge attributes this same fall of man to man's choice to identify himself through the outward flow of sensation rather than his intrinsic divine nature. Although sometimes superficially viewed under the cloak of original sin, this notion of karma, or reaping what one has sown, explains all human suffering as a self-created condition. Accountability for one's lot, therefore, plays a central role in the healing traditions of the major world religions. While this sense of personal accountability is carried further than is generally applied in the shamanic traditions, it calls no less upon ritual as a physical means of relating with the spiritual realms to facilitate healing.

Whether performed by an individual with demonstrated spiritual talents and authority, or considered to be within everyone's capability, ritual is a cornerstone of the major world religions. From the Catholic Priest who gives the sacraments for his clergy to the Muslim who fasts for purification, from the Jewish Rabbi who chants for his temple members to the Buddhist who meditates for self-realization, from the Hindu guru who performs laying on of hands to the Protestant who prays for his salvation, religious people rely on ritual. Some religious rituals seem as straight

forward as lighting a candle, while others are as elaborate as crafting a mandala out of colored sand, and while it is beyond the scope of this text to explore the details of the rituals used within the context of religion to manifest healing, it is important to emphasize that ritual is universally seen to play a key role in opening the healing gate between mundane reality and the spiritual realms of God, ascended saints and the Holy Spirit.

Ritual seems to make spiritual affirmation a tangible thing. It follows then that a ritual is effective to the extent that it helps an individual visualize and grasp a spiritual force from the ethers to hold until it manifests physically. This would seem somewhat operator dependent, being influenced by cultural and individual talents and biases. But certain rituals seem to be recurrent throughout time and space, suggesting that some are more effective than others, perhaps because they physically touch more closely on an underlying spiritual or archetypal reality. The guru who touches his disciple on the forehead, a recognized energy center associated with the pineal gland known as the third eye, may have more success in the transference of insight than his counterpart who pinches his disciple's nose, (depending, of course, on intent.)

While ritual plays a central role in spiritual approaches to healing, it is seldom viewed as being absolutely necessary. Most authentic spiritual healers, whether priest or shaman, operate with a humility which recognizes a greater power than themselves. No ritual can overcome nor substitute the ultimate mystery of Divine Will. Even time-tested rituals are prone to fail if the individual is not ready for healing. Similarly, where spirit is open, spontaneous healing is possible, even outside of the context of ritual. Often minimized in conventional healing circles with such terms as placebo and spontaneous remission, healing outside of the context of ritual is a verifiable phenomenon which the religious paradigms have attributed to the mysterious Grace of God.

Manifesting Divine Grace is, in fact, the central goal of most religious traditions. Approaches to this goal obviously vary from tradition to tradition, but the personal transformation acquired in its quest and fulfillment is described universally. Sometimes described as salvation, other times as liberation, spiritual transformation is considered to be a restoration of one's relationship to God and that image of God within oneself. This restoration is likened unto death of one's old self in order that one may be born again into a newly atoned relationship with Divinity. Most traditions suggest that many deaths must transpire, both metaphorically and literally, before absolute healing can manifest. This implies that life's challenges, while reflecting a lack of atonement, at the same time serve as a means to achieve its realization. The human condition, with all its dis-ease, is a crucible of transformation. Even physical death is not a failure, but only a physical manifestation of spiritual transformation. The same free will that is responsible for disease can also choose responsibility to attain wisdom through life's lessons, and thus, by the Grace of God, heal.

Viewed as such, our life on Earth can itself be likened to a ritual, for it is a physical process which facilitates spiritual healing. Every stage of human life offers its unique challenges, the most notable of which being honored universally through time as rites of passage with profound significance. Old age, for example, has long been recognized as a phase wherein the individual must face physical mortality. Through grieving the physical callings of parenthood and business, the elder is freed to realize spiritual wisdom. Such rites of passage are still honored in more aboriginal societies, and while such initiations seem less honored in contemporary society, their universality is quite evident in our myths, fairy tales and folk stories. One need only observe the parallels between the archetypes in the King Arthur myths and the initiations through which a boy must pass in becoming a man to recognize how life's challenges have long been respected as a necessary means for soul growth. Life itself is a school through which we can, if we choose, learn our lessons in the most organic terms, and by doing so heal at the most profound level.

The spirit centered paradigms offer big pictures to understand our little lives. If our true nature is spirit, immortal and whole, then life as we experience it on Earth is but a rite of passage to remind us of who we really are. Suffering, disease and even death are only physical lessons along our overall spiritual journey toward self-realization. While health and disease at the physical level are dependent upon spiritual factors, many of which beyond our comprehension, accountability for our human condition ultimately lies on us. Recognizing this, spiritual healers use ritual, both in its organic and man-made forms, to emphasize our ability to spiritually make up for the shortcomings which underlie our sufferings. Physical healing is secondary to spiritual healing.

Chapter 4: Microcosmic Paradigms

The concept of microcosm is based on the observation that laws of nature manifest similarly in all forms at all levels of magnification. The same principles which govern the Cosmos also govern its components. As such, every component can be considered a smaller version of the Cosmos itself, namely a microcosmos. The term microcosm suggests both relativity and self-repetition. Take, for example, a tree branch. Loosely speaking, a tree branches from a single trunk a number of times, establishing an overall pattern. Each branch is microcosm relative to the tree, for it demonstrates the same branching pattern itself. Metaphorically, man can be seen as one such branch on the cosmic

tree. Demonstrating the same attributes as observed in the Cosmos, man is a microcosm to the universe. It is this principle which defines a group of healing approaches, termed here as the Microcosmic Paradigms.

Although ancient, the notion that man is a microcosmic version of the universe is by no means unscientific. Science is, after all, an empiric process of pattern recognition, its ultimate goal being to define natural law in its most fundamental form. Ideally, such laws operate no less at the universal level than at the subatomic level. Evident in art and writings dating back many thousands of years ago from sources as diverse as Egyptian, Greek and Mayan, microcosmic paradigms have surfaced in myriad forms around the globe, including such current frontier sciences as quantum physics and fractal geometry. It is perhaps most recognized, however, in the Eastern healing traditions from China and India, where these ancient principles were not only developed in great detail, but are still applied. Exploration of these traditions can yield profound revelations regarding the nature of healing and of reality itself.

Inspired by Taoist philosophy, the classical Chinese healing paradigm is based upon the unifying principle of complementary opposites, namely yin and yang. It is obvious that such opposites exist in the nature, and it is equally obvious that, once recognized, this pattern is universally applicable. One cannot have light without darkness, nor masculine without feminine, nor up without down, nor hot without cold, and so on. Relativity is inherent to this concept. A woman's waist, for example, is yin (below) relative to her head, but yang (above) relative to her feet. Yin and yang are complementary to one another, intrinsically defining each other. As such, one cannot be changed without changing the other, for they exist in dynamic equilibrium relative to each other. As the universe continually changes and transforms, so man demonstrates from moment to moment this dynamic equilibrium of yin and yang, earth and heaven, excess and deficiency. Man is said to be healthy to the extent that these ever-changing forces within him are balanced and diseased to the extent to which they are imbalanced.

The principle of yin and yang was expanded into greater detail by five element theory. Five basic elements were observed in nature, namely earth, metal, water, wood and fire, each interacting with the others dynamically. For example, water feeds wood while limiting fire, and fire feeds earth (as ash) while limiting metal, and so on. Like yin and yang, the five elements through their individual creative and destructive qualities exist in dynamic equilibrium with one another. An element cannot exist in excess without causing deficiency elsewhere. Also like yin and yang, the balance of many systems can be explained in the context of five elements, perhaps the most significant of which being the inner workings of man. Upon each of the five elements, therefore, organ systems were mapped, each complete with associated physical viscera, energy channels, emotional qualities, physiologic functions, sense organs, and so on. Every aspect of human psychophysiology is included, being related to every other aspect within the functional framework of five elements. As such, no symptom, disease, feeling, nor desire can be understood without looking at the whole interplay of elements, for if one organ is out of balance, others will be imbalanced. No symptom can be understood out of context of the patient in her entirety. This perspective necessitates the healer to not only look at all symptoms in the context of the whole patient, but also to direct therapy in like fashion.

Like classical Chinese medicine, Hindu medicine, or ayurveda, also views man as a microcosm of creation. The legendary originators of ayurveda, the Rishis, perceived that the source of all existence is Cosmic Consciousness, and thus framed the relationship between man and the Cosmos in terms of consciousness. Through an elaborate heavenly hierarchy man takes his physical form on earth. This physical form is expressed from the Cosmic Source in terms of, once again, five elements, this time earth, water, fire, air and ether. Each element is associated, once again, with psychophysiological spheres of function, collectively interacting and influencing the whole individual. These spheres are expressed from higher realms of consciousness down to physical form on Earth through energy centers, called chakras. The extent to which these chakras express consciousness in balanced fashion reflects health.

It was observed that different individuals embody different qualities associated with the elements, and it could be said that each individual has a unique expression ratio of the five elements which defines that individual's constitution. Three predominant elemental combinations, or doshas, were observed. They are pitta, which combines fire and water, kapha, which combines water and earth, and vata, which combines ether and air. Although these doshas are rarely seen in their pure form, they provide a framework with which to ascertain an individual's particular constitution, which is itself reflective of the individual's consciousness and subsequent chakra imbalances. Once these tendencies are recognized, therapy specific to the individual can be prescribed to help reestablish healthy balance.

Therapies directed within microcosmic paradigms are, generally speaking, based on nature. Serving as the actual template for man, nature demonstrates its elements in varying ratios throughout itself. Each and every food, herb, massage oil exercise routine, and so on, can be said to have a predominant elemental quality. One food may enhance the fire element, while a certain breathing exercise may calm the wind element, and so on. Therapy involves the proper, and often subtle, use of these elements in terms of lifestyle considerations to reestablish elemental balance in the human condition. As such, microcosmic paradigms usually provide gentle, self-empowering and easily accessible means for the individual to approach health.

Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of the Eastern healing traditions is the use of energy contained

within the human body itself. While the modern skeptic may question the ancient Eastern masters knowledge of electricity, there is little doubt that they understood the principle. Electricity is, after all, a product of negative and positive charges which produce potential. The Chinese not only described this in terms of yin and yang but actually demonstrated means to access and manipulate energy therapeutically. Pathways in the body through which this energy courses were mapped with special attention made to certain points along them at which this energy can be accessed, whether by finger pressure, needle puncture, moxabustion or the like. Though developed to different ends, similar pathways were mapped by a host of ancient cultures. The caduceus, an ancient Egyptian symbol still used by the medical profession, illustrates two serpents crossing each other six times around a staff to meet at its winged top. While this served seekers of enlightenment as a description of the two polarized energy currents that ascend the spine forming a chakra with each crossing with a pool of light above the head, it could just as easily serve as a blueprint for a modern laser. Appreciating that the universe is composed of matter and energy, like yin and yang, the ancient Eastern healers were naturally drawn to utilize energy to heal man.

Viewing man as a microcosm offers a host of approaches to diagnose and remedy disease, for the same forces which shape the human condition in the universe are revealed throughout the human condition itself. As such, many diagnostic reflex systems have been identified, wherein the body is mapped upon a component of the body. Just as modern science has mapped a human homunculus upon the parietal cortex of the brain, the Hindus and Chinese, identified similar patterns on the tongue, wrist pulses, energy centers, channels and points, to name a few. These reflexology systems not only provide a means to assess an entire individual, but also treat the entire individual, and often via a localized part of the body, be it an ear or the palm of a hand.

Even the complexity of the mind has been described as a microcosm to the universe. Perhaps the most notable and, until recently, universally recognized means to explain human behavior has been astrology. Astrology is based on the microcosmic principle as above, so below, which is to say that the same forces guiding the heavenly spheres also guide those on earth. Planetary positions, like the elements in nature, were observed to change in synchrony with human affairs. With the potential to make thousands of aspects relative to one another, the planets were used to describe the incredible array of archetypal relationships expressed in human behavior and within the human mind itself.

It could be said that the central theme of the microcosmic paradigms is to perceive wholeness in all things, for the Cosmos, in its entirety, demonstrates its pattern at every level of magnification. Wholeness, of course, does not equal wellness, which is rather defined as a balanced whole. The Cosmos, and every part of it, can be used metaphorically to help man understand his own nature. Likewise, the mysteries of the Cosmos, from the most distant star to the most infinitesimal substance, are all present within ourselves. Such a perspective grants the healer infinite possibilities to not only facilitate healing, but to understand it profoundly.

Chapter 5: Mechanistic Paradigms

The last grouping of cosmologies is characterized by the quest the biophysical mechanisms responsible for health and disease, and as such are referred to here as the mechanistic paradigms. This materialistic focus, at least with regards to healing, represents the predominant perspective in Western Civilization. Conventional medicine as it is currently practiced certainly falls into this category, but so do many approaches to healing which may be considered alternative. While some of these alternatives represent different approaches to the same sense of the human mechanism, others work from a completely different definition of that mechanism. By no means mutually exclusive with spirit-centered and microcosmic paradigms, this continually expansive grouping of healing approaches all share the quest to correct physical causes of disease.

While it may appear obvious that physical effects can be attributed to physical causes, thoughts like these, if any, were not generally encouraged by the Christian Church as Western Civilization worked its way through what has been termed the Dark Ages. During these times all processes of nature, including disease, were viewed as being dictated by the Will of God, but as classic writings by the likes of Aristotle and Plato were rediscovered, many thinkers began to question the authority of the Church to be the sole professor of truth. Such were the historical origins for the so-called Age of Enlightenment, from which a skeptical sense of self and nature emerged that could only be defined in quantifiable terms. No subject would be spared scientific skepticism, not the nature of self, disease nor even God. The unknown was no longer treated with a sense of revered mystery, but rather with a sense of adventure, patience and, as often was the case, convenient disregard.

Thinkers of this new age of science began to aspire to the Aristotelian ideal that everything has a primary cause, which if investigated intelligently enough, can be elucidated. One such thinker, Descartes, in turn defined what is now known as the scientific method to be the new standard for validating professed truths. The human body came to be viewed as a mechanism, whose basic component was the cell. Despite the observable self-maintaining properties of

the body, it was obvious that this elegant machine was prone to break down. Surgery is the most obvious manifestation of mechanistic thinking. If the structure is broken or the tube is clogged, fix it, unclog it or remove it. In time, scientific study diversified, refining the health practitioners understanding of natural phenomena. Etiologies of disease were sought, and while Pasteur's Germ Theory named a major cause of disease, Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection verified this belief with the paradigmatic backdrop that man, however intelligent, is in essence no more than an animal at odds with nature. These two theories became the foundation to an era of so-called wonder drugs. Antibiotics are the prototypical pharmaceutical used to tip the scales in favor of man in his battle against nature, but drugs which halt life-threatening infections would only lead the way to a wide arsenal designed to suppress every sign and symptom known to human experience.

While the use of pharmacy has undeniably eased the suffering of a great many, if at least transiently, the theories on which their use is based were and are still strongly challenged from numerous directions. The religious establishment, for one, has had its reasons to offer resistance to scientific progress, a process which has undeniably undermined the world's appreciation for spiritual definitions and approaches to healing. To a certain extent, most spiritual traditions encourage the principle of living in harmony with nature. Likewise, many healers have questioned the mechanistic verity of such theories and their therapeutic implications, criticizing the adversarial approach to the healing process and the unpleasant and sometimes even toxic side-effects of drug therapy. Out of such dissatisfaction there have emerged alternative healing approaches, (in most cases newer versions of ancient Greek and Egyptian systems,) which emphasize the body's ability to heal itself. Such approaches are generally based on the observable healing effects of living in harmony with nature, maintaining good spinal health, as well as constructive interaction with the human energy field.

Naturopathic schools of healing offered one such challenge with the assertion that health is a reflection of living in accordance with the laws of nature. Working from the belief that nature heals itself, these schools emphasize the use of wholesome air, foods, exercise and hygiene to prevent and even cure disease. Therapies are directed to encourage the individual's self-healing processes of circulation, assimilation, relaxation and elimination. As opposed to attributing disease to infectious agents, the naturopath attributes infection to an underlying imbalance, itself seen to be the result of unwholesome lifestyle. Signs and symptoms of disease are seen to be a part of nature's process of healing, and should not be suppressed. Nature uses germs, for example, to decompose dead and diseased tissue. Infection can therefore be seen as nature's attempt to restore harmony in the individual. Rather than suppress this natural mechanism of dynamic equilibrium, it should be aided, whether by herbs, hydrotherapies or massage, in the least uncomfortable manner possible.

Schools which teach the importance of spinal health such as chiropractic (and, in its origins, osteopathy), likewise, challenge the use of drugs to correct disease, asserting that health is the natural effect of a fully functional nervous system. Observing that spinal nerves carry signals to and from all body tissues, chiropractors emphasize the importance of spinal alignment to maintain health. Nerve obstruction represents the mechanism of disease. Therapy, therefore, involves spinal adjustments to facilitate an unhindered nerve flow which should itself promote self-healing. The nature of such adjustments can range from heavy bone-cracking thrusts along the spine to the very subtle spinal fluid manipulations used in craniosacral therapy.

Perhaps the most eclectic field of natural healing involves the use of energy. While its uses have been elegantly refined in the context of the microcosmic paradigms, energy has been used in myriad forms in the West as a mechanism to facilitate healing. From homeopathy, wherein substances are diluted to the point where only its energetic signature is left, to healing touch therapies like Reiki and Therapeutic Touch, wherein the practitioner utilizes the energy field that her body generates to positively influence the patient's own energy field, to the study of how electromagnetic pollution causes disease, energy medicine encompasses a great spectrum of healing modalities which challenge materialistic medical approaches to recognize the relationship between energy and matter. This field will no doubt become more integrated into conventional health care as technology advances to demonstrate how energy influences the human mechanism.

Despite the challenging contributions that traditions of natural healing offer, conventional healing is still largely typified by the adversarial relationship with natural process. Infections are still fought with antibiotics and vaccinations. Cancer is still considered to be an enemy. The field of genetics continually discovers inborn factors which seem to govern the predisposition for an individual's experience of health and disease, suggesting that our DNA, on loan from nature, is itself riddled with time bombs ready to cripple us. Often praised for the crusade it wages against disease and even death, conventional medicine, from its materialistic perspective, has forced upon itself the perhaps disastrous obligation to do all it can defy nature's perceived tendency to debilitate the human body, especially in old age. While such defiance has certainly inspired heroically effective means to sustain life in emergency situations, it has come under increasing attack from those who feel it often betrays human nature, complete with mind and feelings.

Study of the mechanisms which govern the mind and how it interacts with the body have posed challenges to

the wonder-drug/adversary approach to healing. The behavioral sciences have demonstrated the mind's ability to heal itself, particularly with wise counsel. What's more, discoveries from the fields of psychology, psychiatry and neurology have demonstrated that mental diseases not only have mental causes, but that organic brain disease is linked with mental illness. While most physicians interpret this as justification to treat psychiatric disorders medically, an increasing number of healers are recognizing advances from fields like psychoneuroimmunology, which has actually found that the mind-body connection is a two-way communication circuit, of which the mind appears to have more say. Having elaborately mapped out the physiology of stress, defined here as a mental response to a perceived (not necessarily real) threat, researchers have linked this mind-body circuit to the immune system, which could be described as our physiological endowment to heal. While the stress response serves a role in initially triggering the immune response, it at the same time triggers a delayed suppression of immune factors so they won't overstay their welcome. This is how chronic stress, as it is so commonly experienced, predisposes one to disease and why relaxation is such a panacea to healing. Curiously, a fair amount of research has indicated that love, which could be viewed as the polar opposite to the fear consciousness involved in the stress response, actually (big surprise) boosts immunity. With such insight, it is hypocritical that modern medicine should take on an adversarial role toward nature, for this implies that it perceives natural processes as a threat. Nature is a given reality, and it seems that the chronic stress associated with such fear consciousness is in all likelihood one of the greatest contemporary mechanisms of disease.

Despite the fact that the amazing array of current theorized etiologies of disease is complex and often contradictory, modern scientific thought suggests that all diseases can be attributed to three components, which are, simply stated, nature vs. nurture vs. free will. Short of chaotic variability, genetics is now seen to be the blueprint of human biophysiology, dictating our potentials and predispositions (or our nature). But through a lifetime, the animal, vegetable and mineral influences we encounter (in our environment) initiate these potentials and predispositions, continually creating the given context in which we experience life. Of course, what an individual chooses to do with his given life situation is a matter of his own free will, which defines his lifestyle. Even when presented with a particular disease entity whose etiology remains unknown (as is commonly the case), most modern health practitioners display a remarkable faith that the scientific process, given enough time, will determine its cause in terms of nature, nurture and/or free will.

The mechanistic paradigms focus on understanding the chains of cause and effect. In reference to healing, they are effective to the extent that their approaches can remedy the primary cause without causing more disease in the process. Their capacity to heal is, therefore, a reflection on understanding the human mechanism in its entirety. Endowed with a healing relationship with nature, a physiology and nervous system which promotes self-healing, increasingly subtle energy fields which influence physical health, and a mind-body connection through which love and relaxation demonstrate remarkable healing effects, the human mechanism is complex, to say the least. While signs and symptoms are, no doubt, responsible for suffering in the most superficial sense, their presence suggests that deeper causes exist which will continually manifest, perhaps in other ways, until appropriately addressed. Such is the challenge of the mechanistic paradigms.

Conclusion: A Personalized Paradigm

Healing is a mysterious and yet profoundly relevant phenomenon. Its definition is a challenging but altogether rewarding endeavor, for to do so is to describe a process through which we all can benefit. Many great souls have offered their perspective on healing, and the many paradigms that have surfaced through the ages prove to be a rich resource to the student of healing. This text has described three groupings of paradigms in the attempt to highlight key principles demonstrated in the vast spectrum of healing traditions.

From the spirit-centered traditions we are provided a strong definition of ourselves as spirits being human. Life is seen as a journey, whose destination is the wholeness and atonement with Divinity. The journey is itself healing, and so rituals can help us be mindful of that process.

The microcosmic traditions offer a process to understand ourselves in relation to the universe and the universe in relation to ourselves. With refinement this understanding enables one to appreciate even the most subtle and profound forces at work within the human reflection of the cosmos. Healing is the dynamic process of balancing this reflection within ourselves.

The mechanistic traditions, while in many respects still at odds with some of its own conclusions, is beginning to confirm many universal truths in terms agreeable to the modern mind. The body heals itself, especially when aligned with nature's laws, with love and relaxation undeniably being the strongest medicines.

The three paradigm groupings described here are not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they complement each other beautifully. A detailed exposition of how to reconcile these, however, not included here, for it

is the intent of this text to empower students of healing to create their own personal paradigms.

However, in the interest of guidance, three general principles, or laws, can be derived from this survey which may prove helpful. Number one, approach The Absolute with flexibility. Rules are meant to guide and ultimately liberate, not to restrict or oppress. Humility is the admission that one has room for growth. Number two, take responsibility for personal experience. Life as we experience it is determined by our perception, which is itself reflective of our individual consciousness. By working on our own consciousness, instead of blaming external factors, we have the ability to realize any reality. Number three, affirm the positive. By affirming the Divinity in all, and especially within ourselves, we realize that we are whole and holy beings. And that's what healing is.

And so, the author wishes you well.