

Keynote Address

A YOGA OF HEALING: THE PERSPECTIVE OF A THERAPEUTIC TOUCH THERAPIST

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ABSTRACT

The underlying assumption of “A Yoga of Healing” is that persons who are deeply engaged in healing, also engage themselves in the self-disciplined practices of the deep inner self that define the practices of yoga. Using Therapeutic Touch as a model, healing is perceived as a personal inner quest for the understanding of foundational laws of order about the dynamics of the vital-energy flow from a universal healing field. The characteristics of this universal healing field indicate that it is a complex of order, intelligence and compassion which instills a profound inner quietude marked by a sense of untroubled peace, equipoise and equanimity. Developing a concept of the yogi-healer, various correspondences between the practice of healing and the practice of yoga are discussed within this context.

KEYWORDS: Therapeutic Touch, yoga, intentionality

As the Theme of this Seventh Annual ISSSEEM Conference suggests, our charge is to refine our understanding that all beings are bonded by vast and intricate interrelationships, intercommunions, and interdependencies, and that these finespun connections subtly bind each of us in a unique, holistic mold. In addition, we, here in this forum, have committed ourselves to a further effort, and that is to clarify how these subtle energies dynamically interplay during the healing act, and from this knowledge learn how to help or to heal better. This is a high order commitment, for I have always been impressed that healing is the most humane of all human acts and, therefore, have thought of the process, particularly in reference to Therapeutic Touch which I know best, as a yoga of healing.

Why do I use that designation? Yoga, a term easily recognized in the West as all but its own these past twenty-five years, in fact is not generally well understood, and that may be the source of the wonderment. Therefore, I would like to explore a basis for clarifying this issue, for it has been my observation that there is strong correspondence between the practitioner of yoga—in both the East and the West—and the healer in their individual inner quests, so that I think of these correspondences not only as metaphor, but as reality.

My understanding is that the practice of yoga is concerned with an integration of the individual person with her or his inner self. This leads, in the case of the healer, to a conscious (re-)union with foundational laws of order as she or he learns to become a significant conduit for the vital-energy flow from the universal healing field—universal because all living beings have the potential to heal themselves and others. This last is a basic assumption of Therapeutic Touch that has appeared to be the case since its founding by my colleague Dora Kunz and myself in 1972. The characteristics of this universal healing field indicate that it is a complex of order, intelligence and compassion which instills a profound inner quietude marked by a sense of untroubled peace, equipoise and equanimity.¹

There are three major forms of yoga, called the Threefold Path. Each of these forms, named raja yoga, karma yoga and gnani yoga, lead to the same goal. Raja yoga aims to gain control of the mental faculties by the conscious use of the will, what we in Therapeutic Touch call intentionality. This interpretation of intentionality assumes that one has a goal in mind as well as a will to power.

Over time this yogic practice focuses and integrates the mind to reveal long-hidden or untapped potentialities of the inner self. Karma yoga is a yoga of meeting one's obligations through a motivation of work for work's sake—doing something because that is the right or ethical thing to do in the situation, rather than as a desire for results. The third way or path is called gnani yoga. Gnani is a yoga of wisdom, a more abstract search that is marked by an intense desire to analyze, to experiment, prove and classify inner knowledge. It is the path of the scholar, and one uses one's own search for wisdom as the experimental grounds upon which to draw introspective conclusions. My premise is that those who are deeply engaged in healing, also engage themselves in these self-disciplined practices of the deep inner self. For instance, with regard to gnani yoga, at this time such practices have stimulated 28 doctoral dissertations and 18 postdoctoral researches on the Therapeutic Touch process, and I am sure practitioners of other healing modalities have been similarly challenged to find the essential nature of the healing process that engages them so profoundly.

In a manner closely corresponding to these yoga practices, the characteristics of the yogi-healer include a highly focused concentration during the healing act; in Therapeutic Touch we begin with the act of centering one's consciousness and, importantly, remain on center during the entirety of the Therapeutic Touch process, even while engaging in skills of rebalancing vital-energies as are called for by the individual healee's condition. In this, Therapeutic Touch, like the practice of yoga, is an act of interiority that provokes deep, though conscious relaxation and integration of the mind. This state of consciousness, in the words of Patanjali, the renowned teacher of yoga who lived about 200 BC, bestows “. . . control of the thought-waves of the mind.”² In working this through, the self-disciplined mind can be used to intensify the strength of prana, the vital-energy complex so central to healing.

The practice of Therapeutic Touch, as noted, entails maintaining this centered state of consciousness as a ground against which one uses the hand chakras to do an assessment of the healee's vital-energy field. In this way the Therapeutic Touch therapist conceptually constructs a map which then acts as a guide for the rebalancing of the healee's vital-energy field.³ Finally, the rebalancing is checked by a reassessment of the healee's field to reinforce the therapist's understanding of the post-intervention dynamics of the vital-energy field, and

to clarify how to plan for the next therapeutic session, should that be necessary. During these phases, the Therapeutic Touch therapist may or may not make contact with the healee's body as need indicates. However, in general, not touching the body—that is, working only in the healee's vital-energy field—forces the therapist's sensitivity and most usually gives the therapist more information about the patterning of these subtle energies.⁴

The goal of yoga is the realization of the difference between the appearance of things and their reality, and in this inner search, yoga—as is the case in healing—involves a long and intensive course of self-discipline and self-realization. Besides the Far Eastern paths of yoga previously noted, there is as well a yoga of the West, the kabala, which follows this way of using the mind through concentration, meditation and contemplation in its realization of the Tree of Life, a realization shared by the healer whose goal is conscious awareness of the vital process in which she or he is engaged.

Common characteristics of all yogis are that they have an inward-flowing consciousness (antarvritti, Skt) that guides them on their path towards awareness of their own cosmic connection. As this way is trod, they become increasingly aware that this connectedness runs through them and that they may serve as a conduit to channelize the universal healing flow. Where this can be fulfilled, as Swami Rama states so clearly: “They are dependent on nothing external and on no person, but many are dependent on them for succor, solace, knowledge and healing.”⁵

In the course of time, the centering of one's consciousness becomes an intrinsic part of the lifestyle of the Therapeutic Touch therapist. As the range of the centering experience deepens, this experiential grasp empowers the therapist to transcend present limitations of ego while engaged in helping or healing another. When the act is clearly lensed by intentionality, it brings the self to the threshold of higher levels of being. We get to understand this aspect of consciousness experientially as it plays through us in a focused manner. Centering becomes an inward journey through which insights arise, self-knowledge is fostered, and personal transformation can occur. One finds that the “deeper” one can go within oneself, the easier it is to help ill persons whose source of illness dwells on comparatively less profound levels of energy. One realizes that both healer and healee are expressions of a unified therapeutic

intervention, and in the process both are mutually healed, made whole and at-one.

The combination of centering, compassion and recognition of a sense of order or meaning in life, over time becomes a mutual resource as well as a refuge. This can proceed as an individuation process for the healer as she or he strives toward integration, order, wholeness, and self-transformation. A clearly recognizable shift occurs in perception and in one's sense of identity and emotional state. These changes can rapidly restructure evaluative and cognitive processes, the sense of personal time and space, and how we get meaning from life's experiences.

From data collected over the past twenty-five years, during the Therapeutic Touch intervention a characteristic profile of behavior can be described: The healers begin to relate to an other-than-usual sense of time—a sense of timelessness, actually. Also, they are unaware of the press of their outer environment, and they seem to be attending to a subjective world of evaluation and comprehension of the healee's condition by means that “feel” familiar, but are very difficult to describe. An increased sensitivity may arise from these experiences that can lead to facility with higher sense perceptions and, in many cases, a personal transformation of personality and intellect begins to configure a new gestalt.

Such transforms of the human personality are not rare in the annals of healing. The history of the therapeutic use of hands extends about 15,000 years into our past, as is indicated, for instance, by still discernible paintings in the Cave of the Three Brothers on the French side of the Pyrenees. During that time healing and those who practice it have been viewed over a broad spectrum, from the perspective of awe and mystery, on the one hand, to use of healing as a power tool and its manipulation for political purposes.

The earliest healers, of course, were the shamanesses who healed their men around the home fires when they went to fight against other men and beasts and fell ill or were wounded. Time does not permit a detailed account of the genuinely fascinating history of healing; however, I can share a conviction that there must be something utterly valid at the core of human healing for it to predate our civilization—our cultural base, the Egyptian dynasties, for instance,

only go back 10,000 years—and then for healing to have continued to coexist within our culture, even in these high-tech times.

The ability to heal seems to have been a natural trait among the great teachers of the world, and from them we have learned the meaning of the “tough love” of true compassion. After centuries in which the practice of healing was considered the domain of the dominant religion, as a political play for power between church and state, at about the eleventh century, a type of healing was assigned to nobility—particularly of France, Germany, England and Norway—that was called The Royal Touch. The Royal Touch continued in vogue until early in the eighteenth century, ending with the reign of Queen Ann of England. Although a good deal of this was a sham, healing others was sometimes a deeply moving experience that evoked an attitudinal change in some. Notably, there was King Olaf of Norway, who was canonized in 1164 AD and became patron saint of that country.

One remarkable person who claims a unique place in the annals of healing was an Irish nobleman, Valentine Greatrakes.⁶ I shall discuss him in some depth as an example of the being and reaction to healers in our Western culture. Greatrakes was in the wars with Cromwell, and when it ended he returned to his estates in Ireland. In some not well documented manner, as he worked with and cared for the peasants on his land, he found that he was able to heal their sicknesses and wounds, and his fame spread throughout the countryside.

He carefully claimed that it was not he that healed, but God who worked through him, and so, because of his nobility and humility he was tolerated, if not accepted, by the clergy. Interestingly, he did not necessarily touch the person he was healing, but worked in what we would call the vital-energy field of the healee. Parenthetically, until I read this, I had thought that we had discovered this trick! Now, because of this and other of his attributes, I often think of him as the patron saint of Therapeutic Touch. This healing style, however, was fortunate for it conformed to the social mores of the time, since the healees did not have to take off their clothes.

Another plus in his favor was that he refused payment for his healing services. For all these reasons his healing work was supported by several scientists and accepted by notable clergy. One of the scientists was the renowned chemist,

Robert Boyle, who also was one of the founders of the Royal Society in England. The scope of Greatrakes' healings were impressive: tumors, paralysis, kidney problems, headache, deafness and arthritis are all reported to have been healed by him. He kept anecdotal records which he wrote up with great clarity and published, openly admitting that his methods did not work consistently. However, what did work, was startling and in 1666 he was invited to London to demonstrate his healing skills.

Large crowds met his boat at the dock, and followed him in procession through London. He did his healing work on whoever came to him and although, as he had previously written, his methods did not heal everyone, there was great enthusiasm for his skills. However, the medical society of the day refused to acknowledge him, and throttled his popularity by utterly ignoring him and being indifferent to his requests for an objective examination of his methods of healing. Dejected and disheartened, Greatrakes finally went back to his estates in Ireland, and the world ever since has been the poorer for it. Unfortunately this story has been repeated in many guises over time. Consistently our culture has failed to appreciate that the inner work of healing is not magic; it is real.

Quickly passing over the next several centuries where, nevertheless, the lives of healers acted as a model for their neighbors or otherwise influenced the period, I would like to recommend to you one who was a legend in his own time, the Mexican charismatic healer, Don Pedro Jamillo, who lived in southwest Texas during the nineteenth century. His healing and demeanor was such that he became all but a myth among the border people, and his fame spread beyond those borders. After his death he was apotheosized and has become an internationally acknowledged folk saint in whose name many healings are claimed, even today.⁷

Until the middle of the current century healing continued to be regarded almost exclusively within a religious framework. One of the healers whose attitude towards healing exemplifies that of most healers through the 1950's and 60's was Olga Worrall, who died a few years ago. She possibly was one of the most intensely studied healers of our time; in fact, she was studied by Dr. Elmer Green, the founding President of ISSSEEM.

Olga said that she was born with healing ability, and went into the healing ministry early in life. She gave herself to innumerable researches out of her religious convictions about healing. One of her most remarkable feats under controlled conditions, was her ability to alter the hydrogen bonding of water—thereby making it “heavy water”—by using her healing abilities on the experimental samples of water.

Her explanation for her healing ability was that “We work with God’s laws of perfect health . . . in energizing the atmosphere around a person.” She continued, “I just let God take over . . . I become a clear channel, God-centered . . . I am in a constant state of prayer . . . I tune in and then become a clear channel and let the energy flow.”

And so, healing seems to be the old, constantly retold. As we look through time, the experiential knowledges that arise are seen to be a never-ending story of personal inner work that nurtures the healer’s clinical practices and professional posture. One begins to truly understand that we are dealing not only with something “out there,” but we are also being provided with a hint of the fullness of the human stature. This also applies to yoga. For instance, Govinda has made it clear that the secret of yoga is experience. It is based upon “. . . and makes use of a language that can only be understood in the light of experience.”⁸

Yoga does not claim to be new knowledge, he explains. The yogi vivifies normal energetic processes whose functions have lain dormant due to ignorance about certain universal laws that govern their use. Since we are not aware of them, there has been a consequent disregard of them in Western considerations of the life process.

In the human being, the stage is set for the translation of these universal laws through nonphysical foci in the human energy field which function somewhat as do electrical transformers, transforming prana and other relevant energies that are out in the universe into the kinds of energies that make us human. These foci are called chakras (Skt). Their function is to collect, change and distribute vital-energies to the organs and tissues of the physical body through media that are called nadis (Skt). In essence, they make possible the integration of the human psychodynamic field with the chemico-physical field that lays the groundwork for the integration of psychosomatic functioning.⁹

We, in the West, barely understand this context. In order to do so, we must rephrase our mindset, seek out the essential, more fundamental questions regarding the healing process, and structure a new modeling within which to answer them. It is good to ask, “How can we recognize persons with high potential to heal?” Or, “Is the ability to heal genetic, or is it potential in all humans and actualized by life’s experiences?” But questions of this nature open the gates to innumerable intervening variables. Even in our day, questions such as, “Does a healer’s expertise rise out of his or her spiritual growth?” is fraught with the danger of bias. Concerns such as, “Are there problems for which human healing is most effective?” are much too generalized, and queries such as, “What are the limitations of healing?” are much too arrogant.

However, I find that questions such as, “How is it possible that we are able to draw on energy that is not ‘ours’ and use it with intent?” open more widely the doors of inquiry. From this stance I can ask myself, “What are the contexts in which healing becomes most understandable?” A question such as this gives me a more unified perspective for my quest. With only a slight nod to its possibly humorous aspects, I now can ask something like this, “What makes Wirkus work?” As I am sure most of this audience knows, I am referring to, and kidding a bit, Mietek Wirkus, who is this Conference’s Co-Chair, and who could heal since he was three years old.

If I look at this man seriously, I wonder not only about his relationship to matter and energy, and to space and time; I also wonder about his relation to timing—for rhythm, I find, is crucial to the healing process. I not only think of Mietek’s metabolism—for, from one point of view, our bodies are but “. . . bags of electrolytes in solution bound within an insulating skin,” as John Upledger succinctly terms it—I also wonder at the role the body’s processing of light has on his chemico-physical frame. I would think of how he uses his local magnetic field, but I would also look at how he interplays with the cohesion of matter, for what is wound healing fundamentally, anyway?

And, not the least, I would seek out the keys to the consciousness of a Mietek Wirkus. How does he apprehend his inner universe, and how does he get meaning from it? Here a transcultural base for the inquiry would be invaluable, for in the West our understanding of human consciousness is admittedly limited. In the East—thanks to the in-depth explorations of yogis and sages

of the ancient past—a most profound understanding of human consciousness has been pursued through the subjective study of the chakras, a Sanskrit term which is properly defined as referring to centers of different kinds of human consciousness. I personally believe that an appropriate study of the chakras, on their own terms, will provide the “open sesame!” to significant and critical aspects of the mysteries of healing. Specifically, it is the appropriate perspective from which to probe the prime question I put before you: How is it possible that we are able to draw on energy which is not “ours” and use it with intent? Therein lies the seventh key, the “Open sesame!” to the door through which we must pass in seeking a satisfying unified theory of healing. In the moment that this occurs, healer and yogi will perceive themselves reflected in each other’s eyes.¹⁰

Therefore, in summary I reiterate: Like yoga, healing is experiential and it is that interior experience that informs and may transform the healer. Like yoga, healing has a prehistory that is both cultural, in terms of human development, and it is personal. In this, it seems to respond to the urgings of the unconscious as it strives to individuate, to become singularly aware. This aspiration becomes a reality as the individual healer sees the behavior of her or his inner self reflected in the healing moment. Like yoga, healing as a lifestyle engenders a point of view or comprehension that is best defined by a Sanskrit term, *darsanna*: healing becomes a *darsanna*, a vision, that sets the context for every act. In this the practice of yoga and the practice of healing truly reflect each other.

One then wonders: If there are so many similarities, what is the universe telling us? I think it is that this is the way we should act towards one another, with a conscious concern each for the other; with a mindful awareness of who we really are and what our personal mission is. And, most importantly, with a clear recognition that in our time, at this very moment, there are unique opportunities for this inner work to thrive, if we but accept the challenge offered by explorations in depth of our individual worldline of planetary energies, global interconnections, and personal healing.

Thank you very much for your attention. I’ve enjoyed sharing these thoughts with you.

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