

The Healing Power of the Mind

You have probably heard it said that the mind is a very powerful thing, yet have you ever stopped to consider the ramifications of that statement. Certainly it has proven to be true in my medical practice and I have spent years of study evaluating the nature of the mind in healing and have been led into many varied arenas of interest.

One of the most intriguing topics of study in medicine is that of the placebo effect. This is an effect that can occur when an inert substance is given to a patient and which results in a relief of the symptoms of the condition being treated. It has been postulated that much of what we do in traditional medicine relies on the placebo effect. Evidence supporting the truth of this idea is suggested by the finding that the prescribed medication works for a while but the dosage needs to be increased in order to achieve the same results giving rise to the idea that it is not the substance itself that is responsible for the effect. This is called “tachyphylaxis”. One of the most common findings with placebo is that of tachyphylaxis. My favorite placebo story is that of the placebo treatment of a patient, Mr. Wright. The full story can be found on this website http://www.psyc1.com/19_mr_wright.html and is well worth the time to read.

Why does placebo work? That is the question that leads to an understanding of the power of the mind to create healing. Since treatment by placebo works best if the prescriber is enthusiastic about describing the potential benefits of the prescription substance, embellishing it with stories of how well it has worked in other patients, and since there are no active ingredients in the prescribed substance, it must be obvious that any changes in the recipient of the placebo must be self-generated. And this is the stepping off point in the study of the healing power of the mind.

It was thought for many years that our genes provided a total explanation for how we are made up and that our genes determine the nature of our disease processes and healing ability, and that we were fixed by the behavior of our genes. Unfortunately with the recent genome project in which a complete map of our genes has been elucidated, we now know that there aren't enough genes to explain the complex processes that make up our behavior.

A new and exciting offshoot of genetics labeled “epigenetics” has many of the answers to our questions. The new science of epigenetics is founded on the knowledge that genes don't have an “on-off” switch, so how can they respond to our varying day to day needs. Genes are responsible for the design and manufacture of proteins; the building blocks of our living bodies. It is necessary in the healing process to produce very specific proteins that have the where-with-all to heal damaged or diseased tissues. If our genes can't turn themselves on to confront the disease processes, then something must be turning them on. It is the contention of epigeneticists that this is a function of the mind, and since we lack the in depth knowledge required to consciously decide which proteins are required for the healing process, then it must be some other process at work. It makes sense to suggest that it is at an unconscious level that this process is activated.

It is a contention in psychology that the presence of an unconscious part of the mind cannot be validated, and it is therefore taken for granted that it does exist without proof. I believe that there is a very convincing area of evidence that supports the existence of the unconscious mind, and that is the science of quantum physics. This is a branch of science that is proven to be valid over and over again. Millions of experiments have been performed demonstrating the veracity of quantum physics. One of the foundations of quantum physics is that human consciousness has a direct influence on the outcome of quantum physics experiments and that without human consciousness, the experiments simply don't work. We have insufficient knowledge of any conscious input that can affect the outcome of the experiments, therefore, it must be the unconscious aspect of consciousness that is responsible for what happens.

We are made up of tissues, which are in turn made up of cells, molecules, atoms, subatomic particles, and according to the quantum theorists strings and membranes too small to see. These elementary particles of which we are made are subject to the laws of quantum physics, therefore they require the input from the unconscious mind for their behavior. This being said, it seems obvious that the unconscious mind is the foundation for our status and behavior on an ongoing basis. Since our genes are a physical part of our cellular make up, they are also comprised of molecules, atoms, and sub-atomic materials. They are therefore under the direct influence of the unconscious aspects of our being. It seems obvious that our unconscious minds are the basis by which change and healing can take place.

I have now come full circle with my arguments, and am back to the explanation of the placebo effect. If this reasoning holds true, then the arguments are equally valid as an explanation of how healing takes place. I believe all non-traditional approaches to healing from Shamanism to hypnosis including NeuroLinguistic Programming are explained by these arguments, and add power to the idea that we are our own inner source of healing. It might be a very revealing practice to consider the source of illness as well. It is also possible that in time most of what happens in traditional medicine will be explained by the concepts of self-healing. Even in an area that seems far removed from psychology, that of surgery, is not immune to these concepts. There have been surgical procedures performed in which nothing more than the opening of the body cavity has been done and no definitive surgical procedure performed and the patient has recovered from the illness for which the surgery was performed.

This paper has been presented as support for the incredible power of the mind in the healing of disease, and I wish to extend my appreciation to the many patients with whom I have had the privilege of working and studying the disease and healing processes.