

Editorial

MIND AND SPIRIT IN HEALTH

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. . . for many, many years religion and science had gone hand and hand like lovers, as I have said. But science has faithlessly torn itself away from religion with the results that we see in polluted rivers, destroyed environments, and poisoned human bodies. I think it is high time that science was brought back into the realm of the spiritual so that it would wear the blanket and feel the caress of spirituality and have a reverence for the world and all that dwell in it.

—Zulu Shaman, Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa
Song of the Stars, Station Hill Openings, Barrytown, LTD., 1996

An old-time medical practitioner, whose father had also been recognized as a “good doctor” by his community, once described to me his father’s regimen for dealing with a condition of “no known physical cause.” A special section of his father’s medicine bag was, it seems, reserved for pills of many different colors. After consulting with the patient in a human and sympathetic way, his father would commonly take his time—right in front of the patient—selecting a pill of just the right color (presumably representing the appropriate medicine for the precise condition affecting the patient), and then providing very precise directions for just how the “medication” was to be taken. Reportedly the physician’s attention to detail in dispensing this placebo sufficiently engaged the patient’s own healing powers, often to the point that effective response was stimulated.

With placebo-testing of treatments, medicine seems to have forgotten the effects of mind and spirit in healing might extend well beyond placebo effects, a term it began to apply to many supposed unexplainable treatment effects, as in, “It’s nothing but a placebo.” The current issue might be entitled “Mind and Spirit in Healing: Beyond the Placebo Effect.” Each of its articles reminds

us in its own way of what a potent force mind and spirit can be in the healing process.

Writing with crystal clarity in “Spirituality, Science and the Medical Arts,” Larry Dossey cogently addresses effects of prayer on medical efficacy observed in several exemplary double-blind studies. Also explored are resistances among medical scientists to considering such scientific data. Finally, Dossey recognizes the challenges to scientific model-building represented by data on non-local healing events, while suggesting current and longer-term scientific strategies in relation to this data.

In his thought-filled theoretical paper, “Etiology Recapitulates Ontology: Reflections on Restoring the Spiritual Dimension to Models of the Determinants of Health,” Jeff Levin points to an impact of prevailing understanding of the nature of human life within particular social groups on models of etiology and disease causation. Scientific evidence is presented from epidemiology, psychophysiology and clinical medicine of the reality and usefulness of a body-mind-spirit model in health. Sources of resistance to adopting such a model appear to be developing not only from leaders of conventional health sources but also from some leaders of religious and spiritual fields. Levin also considers some very practical suggestions for overcoming problems in funding research in this area.

While employing an own-control single group outcome design, John Upledger, in his paper titled “A Program for Children to Enhance Compassion and Self-Esteem and Reduce Violence” demonstrated increased social skills and decreased problem behaviors following introduction of a “Helping Hands” treatment procedure with 274 kindergarten, first and second grade children in a public school. The results appear to demonstrate reduced violence, and enhanced compassion and self-esteem in this group following use of this simple bioenergy intervention.

We are graced in this issue with two Presidential addresses by virtue of another ISSSEEM co-presidency for the year. In her paper titled “The Unfolding Spirit in Healing” Christine Hibbard presents a report of personal experiences in relieving post-war trauma in Kosova, Yugoslavia, and proposes as well that Ken Wilber’s theoretical model offers a comprehensive view that can be useful in

study of body-mind-spirit phenomena. Finally, she describes another fascinating personal experience that helped to shape her current understanding, and leads her to share in a Hopi vision. The author's humanity and intellectual aliveness shine through her presentation.

David Hibbard, in "Spiritual Encounters in Medical Practice," describes his experiences in bringing spirituality into his medical practice in a very practical way that is acceptable to patients and colleagues alike. Further, he describes how introducing spiritual factors into an operating room procedure was not only accepted but seemed appreciated and valued by staff. Finally, use of a Patient/Family/Physician Guide created by our co-presidents a few years ago as an advanced medical directive, useful in preparing for life support decisions, was literally a life-saving tool that stimulated the patient to consider spiritual meaning in her life. This encounter brings home in a completely different manner the value of spirituality in clinical medicine.

The issue concludes with a book review of Elmer Green's, *The Ozawkie Book of the Dead: Alzheimer's Isn't What You Think It Is!* by our current President, T. M. Srinivasan. He proceeds to conduct, with breadth, understanding and warmth, an astute and succinct tour of this complex and stimulating three-part volume by one of our founders which will likely be of interest to many of our members.

Finally, on the cover of this issue, Paul Alan Bennett shares with us a dramatic image of spirit and mind in health in his "Chagall's Garden." A lone figure stands against garden flowers, with the spiritual essence of sun flowers in the sky. He remains contemplative, his back carrying signs of tension, but his hands serene. His mind seems occupied with the novel element of an animal figure to which he reacts with vigilance, perhaps guarding himself against this animistic figure intruding upon his mind, and perhaps his health. Still his surround remains benign; he is at home in his garden, his well-being guarded by the essence of flowers, earthly and heavenly. No matter what his earthly travails may bring, all is fundamentally whole and well.

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