

The background of the cover is a dark blue, almost black, field filled with wispy, ethereal smoke or mist in various shades of light blue and cyan. The smoke forms soft, swirling patterns that create a sense of movement and depth. The overall aesthetic is calm and contemplative, fitting the theme of psychic healing.

Psychotherapy Guidebook

PSYCHIC HEALING

Stanley Krippner

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Psychic Healing

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DEFINITION

“Psychic healing” and “paranormal healing” are terms used to describe the alleviation of physical or psychological problems when there appears to be no adequate medical, physiological, or psychological explanation for the healing. It is one example of a variety of alleged events categorized as “psi phenomena” — interactions between organisms and their environment (including other organisms) that cannot be explained by currently held scientific models of the universe.

Psychotherapy, the treatment of problems of mental health, can be defined as a structured series of contacts between a socially sanctioned healer and a patient who seeks relief, and who acknowledges the ability of the healer. Using this definition, any number of unconventional practitioners can be regarded as psychotherapists, whether or not they are also called curanderos, faith healers, folk healers, medicine men, shamans, spiritists, or witch doctors. All of these individuals purport to alleviate symptoms, change behavior, and improve personal functioning through procedures that are not consistent with currently held scientific models. As a result, these individuals

are often called “psychic healers,” even though it is not actually know if psi represents any part of their treatment. Thus, the use of the term “psychic healer” does not imply that the practitioners so described actually possess paranormal abilities.

HISTORY

“Psychic healers” have no common historical tradition, as they have operated throughout history in virtually all parts of the world. Krippner and Villoldo (1976) divide “psychic healers” into four categories, admitting considerable overlap:

- 1. Shamans.** In the strict sense, shamanism is a historical phenomenon of Central Asia where the term originated. Later, similar developments were observed elsewhere. The shaman is, among other things, a magician and a “healer.” He (or she) specializes in altered states of consciousness in which the soul is said to leave the body, ascending to the sky or descending to the underworld.
- 2. Spiritists.** Shamans control their “spirit allies” without becoming their instruments. Spiritist “healers,” however, claim to be taken over by “spirits” during “healing” ceremonies. The nineteenth-century French spiritist Allan Kardec wrote several instructional books that have been especially influential in Latin America. However, “spirit incorporation” also takes place among spiritist “healers” in Asia and Africa.

3. Esoterics. Esoteric “healers” follow various “hidden” teachings, such as alchemy, astrology, the Kabbalah, radionics, tantra, and Yoga. The writings of such esoteric teachers as Alice Bailey are also used as the basis of “psychic healing” by some.

4. Intuitives. The intuitive “healer” undergoes no special training or initiation, responding instead to a “call from God” or simply beginning to “lay-on” hands. Olga Worrall and Ruth Carter Stapleton are examples of intuitive “healers.”

TECHNIQUES

Treatment procedures instigated by “psychic healers” do fulfill the four basic components of psychotherapy as outlined by Torrey (1972).

1. Therapists name what is wrong with, their patients and the very act of naming it has a therapeutic effect because the patient’s anxiety is decreased by the knowledge that a respected and trusted therapist understands what is wrong. The identification of the offending agent (a traumatic childhood experience, violation of a taboo, possession by an ancestral spirit) also may activate a series of associated ideas in the patient’s mind, producing confession, abreaction, and catharsis.
2. Personal qualities of the therapist constitute an important component of psychotherapy. Rogers (1957) has conducted research demonstrating that “accurate empathy, non-

possessive warmth, and genuineness” are of critical importance in producing effective psychotherapy; these traits appear to be more important than the specific techniques used by the therapists or the type of training they have had.

The selection of therapists in other cultures is handled by criteria other than academic achievement; for example, through heredity, “supernatural” designation, self-designation, and/or the automatic designation of individuals who are different (orphans, the blind, the crippled, those who report “visions,” etc.). Much has been made of the allegation that some primitive cultures select their “healers” from the ranks of the emotionally disturbed. However, Torrey (1972) has produced data that indicate that “most therapists in other cultures are unusually stable and mature individuals.”

3. Along with a shared world view and the personal qualities of the therapist, patient expectations are an important part of the therapeutic process. Frank (1974) concludes that the apparent success of healing procedures based on various ideologies demonstrates that the healing power of faith resides in the patient’s mind, not in the validity of its object.
4. Psychotherapeutic procedures represent the fourth component and Torrey reports that the “techniques of therapy all over the world are found to be the same. ... Overall the similarities in the techniques used by witch doctors and psychiatrists far outweigh the differences.” How effective are the procedures

used by “psychic healers”? Torrey has surveyed the existing data and concludes that they have about the same success rate as that obtained by Western psychiatrists.

Psychic healers, of course, use a number of techniques and ascribe to several concepts foreign to traditional Western psychotherapists. It is these procedures that are purportedly paranormal. No single technique or concept characterizes all psychic healers, but the most common are: discarnate entities, Divine intervention, life after death, “out-of-body” experience, “laying-on” of hands, magical remedies and ceremonies, “subtle bodies and energies,” and psi phenomena (e.g., psychokinesis).

APPLICATIONS

In cultures where there is no access to Western medicine, native “healers,” typically, are totally responsible for health-care services. However, in countries replete with so-called psychic healers as well as physicians and psychotherapists, the advice usually given is to see both a conventional and an unconventional practitioner.

As Western psychotherapy attempts to explore alternative approaches to diagnosis and treatment, the psychic healing traditions deserve to be examined. Kiev (1968) has concluded that native or “folk” psychotherapy is “important not only as a form of prevention which contributes to lower

incidence, but as a form of treatment agency whose presence leads to a reduced flow of people going to hospitals.” In other words, an intensified study of Psychic Healing may well produce important practical as well as theoretical results.