

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

The Mind-Body Spirit Connection: Ancient and Modern Healing Strategies for a Traumatic Birth and the Sick Newborn

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Let us talk of healing. The ancient wisdoms teach that all worlds exist now—the past, the present, and the future—all co-existing simultaneously. Man invents nothing. He merely discovers, interprets, and reports what already exists in nature; many medical doctors today believe that it is really nature that heals, not the doctor or the drug, and that medicine merely assists the patients to heal themselves.

The traditions of both wisdom healing and physical medicine can trace their origins back 2600 years to the third Egyptian dynasty of King Zoser, and that master healer-physician, Imhotep. Throughout the flow of human civilization, in Greece, China, Persia, Africa, and India, wisdom healing and physical medicine were not separated. True healing treated man as a whole, as spirit, mind, and body. This concept is epitomized in the 3,000 year old Oriental system of Ayurvedic medicine, which not only incorporates over 2000 medicinal herbs and minerals, but also includes surgery, psychoanalysis, and the cleaning of man's subtle-energy-body.¹

The great healer-physicians of history, including Hippocrates, Avicenna, Paracelsus, and Galen, all recognized that man is far more than a mere physical body and that any attempt to truly heal by treating the body alone is partial and incomplete.

Paracelsus, as a healer-physician, overshadowed his medical contemporaries and set the standard for European medicine for many centuries. He is credited with having founded the sympathetic system of medicine, wherein everything which occupies space—all bodies, plants, minerals, heavenly bodies, etc. influence man by means of subtle energies. He stated that "the ultimate cause of illness is a weakness of the spirit" and he advised his fellow physicians to search within themselves

for spiritual insight to heal their patients. Hippocrates also held to the practice of healing the spiritual as well as the physical parts of his patient's illness.

The birthplace of Hippocrates, the island of Coz, was reputed to have special healing powers, a curative vibration, inherent in the earth and in the surrounding atmosphere.

A word must be said about Shamanism. Dr. Michael Harner states that Shamanism represents the most widespread and ancient system of mind-body healing known to humanity. He states that the methods are at least 20,000 or 30,000 years old. The Shaman is able "to transcend the human condition and pass freely back and forth through the different cosmological planes." Shamanism flourished in the ancient cultures that lacked the technology of modern medicine.²

Now on the eve of this twenty-first Century, we stand upon the shoulder of centuries of ancient healing tradition, peering still further into the bio-psychic evolution of our species. What possibilities do holistic health and consciousness research hold for our expanded awareness as healers?

Some of the most influencing present day research has been done by Dr. Victor Beasley and Dr. Christopher Hill in connection with Chakra functions, energy vibrations, and healing. Basically, what they found is that "human consciousness is a product of light and that an individual's perception of the world is determined by how cosmic light, breaking up the stars' and the sun's undifferentiated white light into the seven color spectrum of the rainbow. Thus light, or cosmic energy, becomes both the creator and the conditioner of the human consciousness and health. The situation is somewhat analogous to holographic laser technology wherein coherent light from a single source is divided into two separate beams, passed and refracted through certain filters, and eventually recombined as a standing wave form which creates an image we call a hologram. Human consciousness then is a hologram created by cosmic light-energy." Hence, all energy from light, sound, color, and all substance becomes increasingly important to the well-being of the individual and has relevance for modern day healing strategies.³

Our hospitals, like our prisons, are made of concrete and steel, are for the most part, void of *natural* light, color, sound, and contains little, if any, negative-ion charged air. Individuals placed in solitary confinement suffer severe disturbances in consciousness, and we create a similar kind of depriving environment when we place our babies in NICU.

Both ancient and modern medicine are well aware that sudden, intense, or prolonged stress is known to predispose one to disease and to cause a breakdown in the physical cells and in tissues.

Stress tightens the body, blocks the chakras, and interferes with the

free flow of energy, both from within and from without. It is well known in the present day Eastern and Western medicine that relaxation is a primary requisite for healing and is a major component of any healing strategy. This premise was also accepted in ancient healing. Relaxation for healing was induced in ancient Africa by placing the patient in a circle of drummers. The monotonous, continuous drumming brought relaxation and subsequently an altered state of consciousness. In Egypt, China, and India, drums, chants, music, bells, water, movement, and meditation was used to create deep states of relaxation so that healing could take place. A few hospitals today have innovative provisions for reducing stress in the adult and older child, yet virtually no hospital has considered stress reduction for the NICU. Unfortunately, much of the stress reduction being done in modern medicine has to do with drug therapy—relaxants and tranquilizers—chemicals which act on the nervous system as depressants.

If our earliest beginning is in a stress-free womb, life is easy and progressive. If, however, the mother smokes, drinks, has poor nutrition, or has a great deal of anxiety and unhappiness, the intrauterine environment is not a healthy one, and the fetus and consequently birth is adversely affected. Drs. Tom Verny, Stanislav Grof, and others have awakened us to the developing consciousness of the fetus—of the energy vibrations being transmitted not only through the maternal system, but also from the external environment.³

Let us consider birth. The process has moved from natural, primitive environments to modern, technological settings of sterile stainless steel. We are connected to machines that interfere with the natural progression of birth. We use machines to make diagnoses that we don't trust our wisdom to make. A particular care is the routine use of the fetal monitor, which many feel has contributed to our high rate of cesarians due to inaccurate reading of the infant's condition. We justify the wholesale use of sedatives, artificial hormones to stimulate labor, amniotomy, epidurals and other anesthesia, episiotomies, forceps, and the controversial amniocentesis and ultrasound procedures. Much of this medical intervention becomes iatrogenic and toxifies both mother and infant. In this strange, technological, and unnatural setting, both mother and infant become stressed.

In the earliest stages after birth, the infant is in a state of consciousness that is all sensation. He has no capability for thought or reason, reflection, or judgment. He is more vulnerable to his experience than an adult, for he has no precedent, no frame or reference with which to qualify or to understand his impressions and sensations.

In the womb, the infant had all his expectations fulfilled. Nothing has prepared him to be alone and even less, left alone to cry. Nothing has

prepared him for a pin. He becomes confused—his crying, the only language he knows—doesn't bring relief. His sense of rightness or essential goodness about his universe and the people in it becomes distorted. He becomes distrustful, confused, and frightened away from his mother's body. He is in a state of stress and pain.

Jean Liedloff in *The Continuum Concept*, "the infant (like the Guru) lives in the eternal now. The infant in arms (like the Guru) lives in a state of bliss. The infant out of arms is in a state of longing in the bleakness of an empty universe."

As our technology increases and the biological survival of the child becomes paramount, the possibilities for stress increase. Even to the most sophisticated observer, a walk through an NICU reveals an environment of space-age technology of chemical and medical interventions.

The injections, gavage, blood taking, insertions of catheters and needles, and the use of ventilators are clearly stressful at best and create torturous emotional conditions for the infant. We see infants with scarred and deformed heels from repeated heel sticks, with deformed and sometimes irreparable damage to the palate and upper lip from feeding tubes—many left in long past the time when the infant could nurse from a nipple. Surely the most frightening and agonizing procedure for the sick infant is the injection of curare to paralyze them for the use of a new space-age jet ventilator.

Stress and anxiety increases the MAO levels, and the entire immune system is disturbed. Many chemical and mechanical treatments are continued long after their value as diagnostic or life-saving agents have passed. The complications that almost routinely develop are often more insidious than the original condition. If these conditions existed anywhere but in a hospital, we would be charged with child abuse. And abuse it is—of the cruelest and most frustrating kind. We save lives, but in the process, we frequently are damaging the quality of the emotional and spiritual essence of the infant. The effect of this trauma can last a lifetime.

One of the most frequent iatrogenic conditions we see is in newborn jaundice. Although phototherapy with bilirubin lights has been used for more than 20 years, it is still not clear *which* babies should be put under the lights, for how long, what wattage the lights should be, how effective the process is, and how extensive the side effects are—especially long term effects. Speck stated that phototherapy "may alter the DNA of human cells and may be a carcinogenic hazard." The infant is often separated 23 out of the 24 hours from his mother—sometimes for a week or two. The lights, which are blue and white fluorescent, also have been

known to affect the nursing staff with discomfort and vertigo.

The atmosphere in the NICU is charged with positive-ions. Energy from natural sources for babies and nurses is blocked. The burnout rate among personnel is higher than in any other unit of the hospital.

Hippocrates said, "first let us do no harm." The best intentioned physicians sometimes prescribe drugs or treatments which do more harm to toxify their patient's system than to correct the cause of the illness. This is not always the doctor's fault, for he may be acting with good propriety and to the full extent of the state of his art. The problem lies more with conventional drug and treatment therapy as an incomplete approach to healing.

In every NICU we see infants lying passively. Many do not cry. Those who do, have weak, little wails of protest that for the most part go unanswered.

The "inhibition of action" behavior was first discussed in 1952 to describe the submissive behavioral pattern, a pathogenic state, that results when the organism can not respond to stress and does not generate noradrenaline and cortisol in the body.⁷

Noradrenaline sets the system in action for fight or flight. The hypothalamus is activated and kept in an overload condition. Cortisol triggers the inhibition of action and depresses the immune system and so a vicious cycle is set in motion. When this kind of "lockjaw" condition exists even for a short time, we begin to see damage. The inhibition of action syndrome produces apnea, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and upper respiratory damage. It produces emotional damage in suppressed energy, lack of trust, and an inability to form attachments and bonds. The infant becomes tactile defensive, pathologically passive, with rigid musculature or lack of muscle tone. Thought processes become aberrant because of pain and a sense of futility and abandonment.

Dr. Walter Hess produced the changes associated with the fight/flight response by stimulating an area within the hypothalamus of cat. By stimulating another area of the hypothalamus, another response was produced whose physiologic changes were similar to those produced during the process of meditation or deep relaxation. This response is similar to an altered state of consciousness or an alpha wave state. Hess termed this reaction "the trophotropic response" and described it as a protective mechanism against overstress, which promotes healing processes. Endorphines are produced and a sense of well being occurs.⁸

There is a spate of modern day research which shows that patients who receive relaxation techniques have lower levels of adrenaline, lower and more stable blood pressures, and slower and more regular heart rates. Research with premature infants shows there is a greater output

of somatotrophin growth hormone, indicating increased myelination, when tactile and vestibular stimulation is provided them soon after birth.⁹

Bovard found reduced pituitary-adrenal and sympathetic-adrenal responses and found that anabolic process were stimulated when gentle touch was provided.¹⁰

Weinberg's classic study found there was less output of corticosterone when the organism was under stress if there had been gentle stroking and touching prior to the onset of stress.¹¹

Ancient healing wisdoms and shamans knew of this protective healing mechanism and attempted to elicit the responses in their patients. The trophotropic or healing response can be produced in the organism through deep relaxation or meditative states with measures such as rhythmic movement, gentle stroking, massage, affectionate touch, muted monotonous sounds, certain music, colors, and water, aided with negative-ion charged air. Ancient healing was frequently conducted in the out-of-doors, in mild, warm sunlight or near the ocean.

To elicit relaxation and healing responses, mothers in Pithiviers, France, Caracas, Venezuela, and a few other places in the world, are being given the freedom to move about during their labor to assume any position they choose, and to have the people to whom they feel emotionally close with them. In these birthing centers medical intervention is kept to a prudent minimum and great attention is given to reducing stress. Music of the mother's choice can be played. Soft, muted colors surround her visual environment. The energy from the color is assimilated and is used to alleviate pain. Growing green plants are placed in the room to provide plant energy. Natural lighting should be used. Artificial lighting should be dimmed or candles used. Some women may like incense burning. The mother is given nourishing food or drink to sustain her physical energy. She is surrounded by other tender and caring women to comfort and assist her to give birth in a natural, safe, and facilitating position. Top priority is given to the quality of the physical, mental and emotional setting. Mothers are encouraged to be open and receptive to their natural and instinctive impulses. They are free to cry, to scream, or to make any noises or sounds that comfort or express their feelings. When we close off our sounds, we tighten muscles and obstruct feelings. If she chooses, she can give birth in a tub of warm water.

Medical technology is applied only when needed. There is no interference in the normal sequence of labor, birth, and the post-birth period. The unit of mother, father, and infant is kept intact. Above all, the attendants at this miraculous event must be sensitive, calm, confident, and loving. They must also be without ego and lend their positive, heal-

ing energies to the birth process. Much has been written about the healing power of a loving caregiver. As a baby emerges, the mother responds instinctively and puts him to breast. It also seems instinctive for her to want to return her baby to moisture, to water. A tub of warm water is provided for her to immerse the baby.

Her healing, and that of the baby, is largely dependent on their symbiotic relationship, especially if birth is traumatic. Mother and baby must remain together for physiological as well as psychological healing and nurturance. Dr. Marshall Klaus has stated that the interface, the sensory interaction of mother and infant, the transfer of energies from one to the other produces hormones and enzymes that promote healing homeostasis in both.¹²

Touch is vital to the newborn. Throughout history, mothers have known that the survival of the species depended on their close physical contact with their baby. Research indicates that the infant is more responsive to touch within the first 5 days than to any other form of stimulation. Other tactile healing measures such as laying the baby on a lamb's wool skin can be used; those from New Zealand have been researched and seem to have special healing properties.¹³ Only natural, soft fibers should be used next to the infant's skin. Frequent immersion in warm gentle moving water is very healing. The benefits of water therapy are multiple and many infants in NICU could be placed in small tubs of water for relaxation.

Visual healing strategies can be used by presenting colors on cards or swatches of cloth with all the rainbow colors. It is known that the cones, the light receptor cells in the eye that give color vision, are not well enough developed in the newborn to see color, so bright reds, blues, purples, and greens could be used for energy vibrations. Hanging crystals for sun-ray energy vibrations would also be stimulating.

Auditory healing strategies such as monotonous, rhythmic sounds are very helpful. Cassette tapes can be played to the infant that provide many different kinds of healing energies. Sounds of the ocean or soft drum beats such as the kind Dr. Michael Harner recorded can provide deep relaxing states.¹⁴ A chanting tape produced by Brother Charles has been found to be very relaxing and almost hypnotic.¹⁵ The intrauterine sounds have been researched in many nurseries and have been found to create soothing, comforting effects in newborns. Music from Bach, Kitaro, Halpern, Georgia Kelly, and many other composers provide healing through auditory senses.

Vestibular healing measures can be provided by the use of cradles, hammocks, rocking, and other forms of gentle and rhythmic movement.

Our effort here is to create a healing sensory environment which will relax and sooth the infant so that emotional and physical healing can

take place. The healing energies described here are designed to open the healing channels in the infant and to provide healing energy vibrations to counteract the detrimental influences of the NICU. This kind of a sensory stimulation is not to be confused with the mental and motor stimulation which is used in many newborn and intensive care nurseries today, and is designed to activate and stimulate the infant's physical development. The kind of healing strategies described here are to provide deep relaxation, to elicit the trophotropic response, and to promote healing on all levels for the infant.

In 1979, Dr. Victor Beasley wrote that "healing is no longer something that occurs exclusively in man's physical body, as determined by the presence or absence of clinically detectable symptoms, pain, or other somatic disease. Healing attempts to tune the entire being into a harmonious whole. This is something we and ancient medicine have long known in theory. Now we are challenged to give practical manifestation to this knowledge. Healing in its essence is a spiritual-soul impulse operating in the worlds of matter, for in the ultimate sense, the patient, not the physician, heals himself through contact with the higher forces of his own cosmic-governed consciousness, whether or not he is aware that such contact has been made. This is Nature's reality."¹⁶

We must strip away cultural mislearnings in order to discover our instinctual selves, to discover creative, spontaneous rhythms of healing that have abounded in our Universe since the beginning of time, to trust our innate wisdom, to trust our body's signals, to trust the prudent use of technology and pharmacology, knowing that in its extravagant use, we can go astray and create harm. We must learn to be patient with the body's healing time schedule, to believe intently that we, as caregivers, have unlimited and untapped healing power to transmit through natural and simple ways to the mother and her infant to enable them to mobilize their own healing energies.

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