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# HEALING OURSELVES

BIOFIELD SCIENCE

AND THE FUTURE

OF HEALTH

**Foreword by Kelly A. Turner, PhD**

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# INTRODUCTION

## A Call for Healing Ourselves

**W**e are living in a time of great potential, alongside significant peril. As I write this, we're in the throes of a pandemic that has the whole world sheltering in place. First responders, particularly our health-care workers, are experiencing trauma and moral injury from witnessing coronavirus deaths and feeling responsible for choosing who of their patients get life-saving treatment and who do not, amid a largely failing health-care system. Even before the pandemic arrived, there have been serious global discussions about how best to save our planet—because we've realized that climate change is a significant reality, not a theory to be debated. Pollution and shifts in weather patterns are wreaking havoc across the world, including increasing the incidence of chronic disorders such as lung disease, which in turn affects heart health. In this changing health and environmental landscape, sociopolitical machinations seem to be pulling society into further polarizations, causing more mental and emotional distress. And with the economic fallout from the pandemic, emotional distress continues to rise within the global human family.

It's safe to say that these issues both affect and reflect the health and mental well-being of nearly everyone on the planet. Before the pandemic even occurred, the World Health Organization (WHO) and Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) estimated that one billion people across the world suffer from a mental, neurodevelopmental, or substance-use disorder.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, one in five adults—and one in six children ages six to seventeen—experience serious mental illness each year.<sup>2</sup> The National Center for Chronic Disease reported that mental health disorders and chronic diseases were costing the United States alone \$3.15 trillion annually.<sup>3</sup> Because of the global nature of these problems, and because we know our emotional health affects our bodies as well as our minds and our behaviors, the United Nations has now highlighted mental health as one of its key sustainable development goals.<sup>4</sup>

So there is the bad news. What is the good news?

Nature shows us how to heal, once we slow down to observe and emulate it. As we shelter in place, we're noticing how profoundly nature regenerates itself. Sheltering in place has us witnessing plummeting greenhouse gas emissions and significant improvements in air quality, bringing blue skies to the most unlikely places, such as Los Angeles. Waterways such as the Ganges River (Ganga), generally fraught with industrial pollution, have begun to clear, with the water becoming potable. Animals usually rarely seen are emerging in natural places generally inhabited by humans.

During the Covid-19 *great pause*, as some have called it, we are reflecting on how we wish to evolve the systems we humans have created for a healthy, thriving life. It is time, as Native American elders say, to foster a world where humans live in right relationship with the Earth and with each other. There's never been a better time for us to envision new possibilities for a regenerative, peaceful world—and to begin to bring that world into fruition.

Today's turbulent times are causing all of us to examine what's working and not working in our systems—the ecological system, health-care system, scientific system, economic system, and even family system. Key to our next steps in improving our human systems is knowing what is possible. Given that our suffering is not only physical—it is profoundly mental, emotional, and spiritual as well—these crises point to the urgent need for us to examine,

personally and scientifically, the ways we can empower ourselves to heal our human suffering instead of feeling powerless and then numbing our pain.

The good news is there is a way out. The flame that lights the path of our health and healing emanates from a source that burns brighter than the darkness of ignorance and suffering in which we have found ourselves. That's because it is a flame of unification that represents the marriage of cutting-edge scientific advancements with ancient spiritual wisdom. This marriage will finally lead us into a whole, integrated model of health and healing that we have known in our hearts, all along, to be true. Scientifically, we are finally beginning to deeply understand our ability to heal not only ourselves but also others. We have far greater power than we might have ever realized.

As we human beings evolve, so does our science. Realities doctors and scientists thought were impossible or ludicrous fifty years ago—for example, that our immune systems are connected to our brain or that our emotions influence our health—are now known to be fact, not fiction. Instead of being afraid of all microbes in our bodies as “invaders,” we’ve learned that our immune system actually has “good bacteria” that can help us fight “bad bacteria,” and that not only do our guts influence whether we get sick but that the balance of bacteria in our guts can influence our states of mind. We are discovering that our bodies and minds do not function separately but are actually parts of an interconnected whole. Discoveries in neuroscience, psychoneuroimmunology, and systems biology have helped us better understand how our thoughts, our emotions, and our sense of peace and connection deeply affect our physical health. In short, science is beginning to move away from models of disconnection and isolation into systems thinking, which fuels greater understanding in how we can heal ourselves and each other—mind, body, and spirit.

It's important to understand that when we talk about integrating science and spirituality, or expanding models of medicine, we're not throwing away conventional, allopathic medicine. This book is not an either/or proposition that suggests we need to eschew everything we've learned about medicine and health. Rather, we need to put all the pieces back together and expand further for the sake of our personal health and societal well-being. Despite what polarizing forces around us might have

us think, health-care decision-making does not have to be a choice between conventional medicine and so-called alternative medicine. We need to step away from either/or thinking, which makes us feel that if we practice yoga, meditate, or practice energy healing, we might be labeled “anti-vaxxers,” “anti-medicine,” “anti-science,” or some other ridiculous characterization. We do not have to choose spirituality over science, as if the two were really separate. We do not have to identify with camps to better foster our health. We do not need to live in fear and doubt, either. We are simply being called to honor and expand ourselves, our personal power and agency, and our full, collective understanding about health and healing. Studies suggest that human bodies and minds operate beyond the simplistic lock-and-key biochemical and receptor interactions currently thought to drive behavior. We are learning that we are not complex machines. We are bioenergetic beings completely intertwined with our environments.

Don't worry. I intend to back up these statements with science. I've been an academic for most of my life, so I am, admittedly, a data nerd. At the same time, I've always been a spiritual seeker—and have been privileged to learn from some influential healers and teachers who have opened my mind to exploring and experiencing the mysteries of consciousness and healing. It is clear to me that both aspects—empirical science and practice-based wisdom—are crucial for elevating consciousness, fostering healing, and transforming the suffering we are experiencing today individually and collectively. It's my honor to share with you what I've learned so far so that it will help you transform your own life and others' lives in positive ways.

Through my research at some of the best universities in the country and my study with some of the world's most renowned healers and spiritual teachers, I've found some key understandings about how healing works, and how we can heal ourselves, that are vital for all of us to know. I'm quite frankly shocked that most people I've met have never been told about these healing keys and have never had an opportunity to explore the practices for themselves. This book is an attempt to remedy that situation.

This book is an offering from me to you. I wrote it because I want all of us to mend our fractured understandings of healing so we can better heal our fractured selves—which are told that we are disconnected from each other,

that our suffering is something “out there” that can only be fixed by a pill or some other outside treatment, and that we have no real power over our lives or our healing process. I want you to know the science behind why you have far more power to ignite your healing process and guide your life than you might have ever imagined. I also want you to be comfortable with your ability to self-heal with practical tools as you nurture and sustain yourself through your journey.

I’ve parsed this book into three parts. Part I, *The Missing Link Between Healing and Consciousness*, shares a bit of my journey to uncover the mysteries of healing and, in plain language, explores what we know about consciousness and healing from ancient spiritual traditions and modern philosophical inquiry. In the first part we also explore how groundbreaking interdisciplinary fields such as psychoneuroimmunology (my field of research) began, why they are so relevant to understanding healing, and why I think biofield science (the study of energy and information) is the bridge to help us finally, truly understand how consciousness fosters healing.

Part II, *Where’s the Evidence?*, focuses on scientific studies of how we heal ourselves and others. We’ll explore what we really know from placebo research and whether, given the data, reframing placebo from a consciousness-based perspective would make more sense. We’ll go beyond the commercial hype of mind-body approaches to better understand what ancient teachings and the research data on meditation, yoga, tai chi, and similar energetic self-healing practices are really telling us about our own abilities to foster our own healing. And we’ll also explore whether there’s actually scientific evidence on whether we can heal others as well as ourselves, as we peer into credible, published scientific studies in biofield therapies.

Part III, *The Healing Keys—with Exercises and Meditations*, is a guide for you to jump-start your inner healing process. In this part, I unapologetically share both scientific data and spiritual understandings and practices. Science and spirituality are not really separate; they are simply different languages and approaches to understanding Truth. These self-healing practices draw from the scientific disciplines of psychology, neuroscience, and psychoneuroimmunology, as well as from spiritual healing wisdom.

Some of the stories I share might seem unbelievable. I'll invite you to simply suspend judgment while practicing your own clear discernment. This is the path that a true scientist, whether a PhD or a citizen scientist, walks. It's important for you, whether you're an expert or an interested person with no formal scientific background, to be able to use your own discernment to determine whether what I am sharing rings true and whether it has value for you. What I can promise you is that every study I reference is based on peer-reviewed, published scientific data. When I've referenced ancient spiritual teachings, I've done my best to choose source texts or credible translations of source-text interpretations. I've done my best not to simply cite one-off studies, but wherever possible to reference systematic reviews and meta-analyses that compile data and conclusions based not just on one study but many studies and have systematic processes that evaluate the quality of those studies as well as their outcomes. I also highlight key studies that I think tell us something meaningful and important about healing.

My wish for you is that, as you read this book, it ignites your deepest knowing—and opens the door to your connection with your full, unencumbered Self. Know that your Source is infinite bliss, that you are and will always be connected, and that you have abundant opportunities to heal any suffering you choose.

We are all on a path to healing, and we are all here to help each other as we walk the path together. It's my hope and intention that this book awakens your healing power and supports you in your journey. Namaste. Let's begin.



A wireframe illustration of a human figure in a dynamic, almost dancing pose, with arms and legs extended. The figure is composed of a grid of lines. From the torso area, numerous thin, curved lines radiate outwards, creating a sense of energy or movement. The background is a light gray with a subtle grid pattern.

# **PART I**

## **The Missing Link Between Healing and Consciousness**

## CHAPTER I

# The Biofield: Uncovering the Mystery of Healing

**W**e are sorry. She only has a few months to live. There is nothing we can do.”

These are devastating words no parents want to hear from a doctor about their child. When Deven and Medha’s two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Meera, their second daughter, started to show symptoms of a stomach flu that wouldn’t abate, they went to the doctor immediately. They thought it might be a case of severe acidity or a chronic gastrointestinal (GI) issue. They never expected a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan to reveal that their toddler had a brain tumor—and the doctors could do nothing to help her.

Deven and Medha took swift action, as any parents would. They sought the best doctors. On the doctors’ recommendations, they had Meera go through radiation treatment immediately. At first, the radiation seemed to work. However, Meera developed nausea and severe ataxia (trouble walking and talking). It appeared she had swelling in her brain. A follow-up MRI showed a recurrence of a tumor in her brainstem, causing the swelling and Meera’s discomfort. The tumor was malignant and positioned in such a way the doctors could not operate to remove it. There was, simply, nothing else they could do.

As you might imagine, Meera's parents were devastated. They had gone to the best cancer doctors to get answers and help, but the doctors did not know how to stop the disease and save her life.

What were their options? Accepting the doctors' words meant they were forced to watch their child painfully and slowly die in a few months. But they were not ready to accept this fate. They decided to seek other options, any safe options that would help their daughter to live and give her any chance to thrive. As they began looking for alternatives, a friend approached them.

"I'm not sure if you're open to this . . . and I know it sounds crazy," he said. "I know a healer in Tel Aviv, Israel. She was a survivor of the Holocaust." He explained that the healer, Sara, was rescued from a concentration camp as a baby after the Gestapo shot her mother. A mere twenty-four hours after the war ended and those imprisoned in the camps were liberated, an officer found Sara, still alive, under her mother's body. Sara believed this traumatic yet miraculous experience gave her healing ability. She had been healing people for many years, even from a distance. "I know it might seem like a long shot, but it might be worth a try to have Sara work with Meera," the friend suggested.

Deven and Medha considered it carefully. Although they'd never experienced distance healing before, they thought highly of their friend and knew he was trying to help them save their daughter. They were running out of options, so it didn't seem like there would be any harm in trying a session with this healer.

Sara agreed to work with Meera and explained to Deven and Medha that she would "tune in" to Meera in California from her home in Israel. She would focus on dissolving the tumor in Meera's brain every week.

Sara explained to Deven and Medha that her healing approach did not necessarily mean that she would be able to cure Meera's cancer. She shared how the process of healing was different from curing. Curing represented getting rid of a disease by specifically targeting it. Sara's healing was intended to foster Meera's inner capacity to heal herself—her body, mind, and spirit—by connecting Meera to her higher self (similar to the concepts of spirit and soul). Although Sara could not guarantee that Meera's tumor would dissolve, she had confidence that the process of healing would bring her a greater sense of peace and well-being no matter the medical outcome. Essentially,

Sara explained that curing Meera's cancer was not up to her but rather to God and to Meera's higher self.

While Sara worked on healing Meera, she asked Deven and Medha to note any changes. She also explained to them how to facilitate a balanced home environment that emulated peace, calm, and happiness to help Meera heal.

After three months of these sessions, despite the doctors' prognosis, Meera seemed better. Deven and Medha took Meera to the doctor for a brain scan. During her first follow-up appointment, the doctors said the tumor had shrunk from the size of a quarter to the size of a dime. In the next appointment, the doctors found no visible anomaly in her brainstem. The doctors were shocked. The tumor was completely gone.

"We can't understand this," they said. Meera's parents told them about the distant healer. "We've never heard of such a thing," they said. "We're not averse to believing in miracles . . . this is certainly a miracle. She's in complete remission."

Meera is still in remission today. She just celebrated her twentieth birthday with her family, well and thriving although still experiencing occasional health challenges such as seizures. She enjoys practicing classical Indian dancing and has performed in public dance troupes in California. Meera's father told me that her indomitable spirit is a lesson for all of us—she is confident, poised, and determined to live her life fully in the best ways possible.

What really happened to cause Meera's remission? Was there really a connection between those healing sessions and Meera's tumor remission, or was this just the belief of her parents? In other words, was it all just a placebo effect (a concept we'll explore in depth in part II)—and if that was the case, what does that say about the nature of healing?

Certainly Meera is not the only one to experience a "spontaneous" remission. Thousands of cases have been reported in the literature, although we still don't understand scientifically what causes these particular people to have remissions from cancer (or other ailments such as HIV, heart failure, and autoimmune diseases). We do know that in many cases, people who experience such spontaneous remissions report spiritual experiences they believe led to their healing.

Meera's case, as with all cases of "miraculous healing," leaves us with more questions than answers. The questions, which I've now devoted my work to