

## *The Healing Field*

### *Miracles*

*“As for me,”* Walt Whitman wrote, *“I know nothing else but miracles.”*

I wonder if his words make us smile because we know what he means — we’ve felt it too — but we’re a little shy to state it like that, so forthrightly. We might sound naïve, or even frivolous.

But what *is* all of this if not a miracle? These words miraculously carrying meaning across space and time! Your eyes seeing the calligraphy of letters and making sense of them! This enormous earth-planet stirring itself in the light of a star to evolve your eyes and breath! And this awareness itself within which everything — everything! — appears! Where? How? From whence does it come?

Who knows? It’s a miracle! We don’t have to imagine a God behind the curtains who we conceive is making it all happen — we can, but that doesn’t make any of this less of a miracle. We can try to explain how everything works, like good empirical scientists, but that too doesn’t make any of this unfathomable reality less of a miracle.

We feel ourselves to be transient, fragile beings, and we are. Our wondrous bodies leap and gesture, love and enjoy themselves — and suffer. We hurt. Disease and old age diminish us. Fears constrict us. It can’t be helped. It happens. Our capacity for joy and our capacity for suffering are an inextricable part of the miracle of being here at all — energy and entropy, being born and dying, holding on and letting go.

As we witness the universe around us, one of the most obvious miracles we see is that the universe is radiant. Even the seemingly empty space between stars and planets, and between you and me, is filled with light. We also see that everything’s moving and evolving — the universe keeps making itself out of itself!

Is it too far-out to imagine that this whole miraculous reality is alive? That our awareness itself is alive? Not the aliveness of carbon-based organisms — that’s part of it — but the “aliveness” of time as well, of being and becoming, and of the way each moment blossoms out of what came before? It’s the aliveness that *gives birth to everything* — our bodies, our dreams, the sun, this moment.

When we ask ourselves to conceive this possibility — that we are sprouted out of, and within, a field of aliveness that has no edge — we realize that we can’t encompass it with our minds. It’s a miracle, a mystery. And yet, since we are *of* this miracle we have the capacity to open to its mystery in a way that’s part of the miracle itself.

I believe it’s this very capacity that can serve us when we seek healing for ourselves and for others.

### ***The Healing Field***

Among the many approaches to healing that we humans have devised — Western medicine, alternative medicine, Ayurveda, homeopathy, etc. — there has always been this enigmatic area variously known as faith healing, distance-healing, healing through intention, prayer healing, and so on. No matter how skeptical we might be about tales of healings achieved through these non-material means, the evidence is enormous that they do — sometimes — work. Not always, but often enough to make doctors and scientists wonder what’s going on.

What *is* going on?

My hunch is that this very “field of aliveness that has no edge” is what’s going on — that when the conditions are right and the people involved are open enough, this field of aliveness that is the *whole* in which we live and move and breath and have our being, can heal what needs healing. How it works is a mystery, like all the other miracles reality is heir to. Perhaps there’s something like a *resonance* established between the “field of aliveness that has no edge” — *the healing field* — and the individual organism.

But there's a danger here. As soon as we conceive that "this is what's going on," we run into the question of why these forms of healing aren't *always* curative. Many cancers and other diseases don't disappear following distance-healing sessions, while some do. I don't believe the reason lies in some failing in those who "transmit" the healing intention, or in the ones who receive it. That's the danger of this view, and I suggest it originates in an incomplete understanding of what healing means.

"Healing," after all, is rooted in the notion of "restoring wholeness." If we limit our conception of wholeness and healing to the restoration of the proper functioning of organs and the circulatory, neurological, and other systems of the body, we're missing the greater whole in which these physical systems are embedded — a wholeness that includes not only what we think of as *matter* but the vast "immaterial" systems that we envision as energy flows, natural cycles, psychological and spiritual well-being, the ways the cosmos unfolds moment by moment, and the nature of "spirit" and "well-being" itself.

For example, if you're on your deathbed — your body succumbing to cancer or heart failure or a serious accident — those "praying" at your bedside would know *not* to insist in their prayers that your physical condition should miraculously transform into full health, back to the way you were a decade or two ago. Their prayers, their healing intentions, would instead reach toward a deeper wholeness — *that you be at peace and free from fear, that your heart may open into a field of thankfulness and love.*

As we contemplate what healing means, we might include this deeper wholeness, not only what we think of as the *physical* aspects of our being but the *non-physical* as well (and that distinction may not be as distinct as we imagine). In doing so we can free ourselves from the danger of considering healing in terms of success and failure, along with the judgments that come with them.

Praying for, or "sending" healing intentions to someone in need, sometimes does result in a cure on the physical level. How that happens is anyone's guess. And how our loving intentions work on the non-physical level is equally mysterious. "*I hope you feel better!*" we say. "*Please know*

*how much we love you!*” Those wishes are prayers too, and they “work” both within, and beyond, the physical dimension of things. Miracles!

It's not easy to describe this without sounding ungrounded and wu-wu. To think that the whole universe, all of reality, is somehow *alive*, upends our materialist view of how things are and “what’s going on.” And yet we say “amen” with Whitman — “*I know nothing else but miracles!*” So let’s suspend our disbelief, at least for a moment, and imagine that the entirety of reality is alive and whole, and that this infinite aliveness is *a field of healing* that does what it does way beyond our expectations of success or failure on the physical plane.

From this rarefied view we might realize that what I’m calling “the healing field” is simply another name for *unconditional love*. “Love,” this word that endlessly escapes our attempts to define it, may be the most fundamental miracle. Love is what restores our wholeness, whether physically or beyond the physical. It’s the healing field in which everything arises and vanishes. As Rumi tells us:

*The sun of infinite love comes into your love,  
and you are given more and more humble work.*

### ***The Healing Breath Practice***

Offering healing prayers, intentions, or wishes — to ourselves and others — is humble work. There are many approaches to this work, some quite structured, some requiring belief in a religious narrative. The practice I’d like to share here involves a simple and easy rhythm of “healing breath” — it takes little practice and can be offered with gentle ease in many situations. You may choose to devote a specific time period for this practice, or gather friends to do it together, but you can also do it any time you can pause for a few moments from your daily activities and attentions. No one needs to know you’re doing it.

There are two phases to this practice — first “inward” and then “outward”:

#### **1. Breathing in the Healing Field**

Begin by imagining that with each in-breath you're welcoming into your body and your whole being the healing field, this ineffable field of aliveness that has no edge — clear, fresh, spacious presence, or safety, or loving light — however it feels to you. Let it be *sensate* as much as possible — the kinesthetic sensation of welcoming the loving light within you. Now as you exhale, allow this clear, fresh, loving presence to pervade your body and your whole being. Let it heal you. It may feel wispy and insubstantial at first — no matter — just welcome it with each breath and let it suffuse throughout your body. There's nothing you need to fixate on or hold still as an image. Remember that you're not “requiring” this healing breath to heal a specific pain or illness. It may do that — or it may simply open within you the deeper wholeness we've been contemplating. Welcome that wholeness.

You may find that you need a little help in focusing your intention as you breathe the healing breath, especially in the beginning. For that you might silently repeat a simple phrase that has meaning for you, such as this line from Inayat Khan's healing prayer, *Nayaz*: on the in-breath: “*Through the all-pervading life in space,*” and on the out-breath, something like: “*May I be healed,*” or “*May love pervade me,*” or “*May light pervade me.*” Whatever words you use, let them be momentary helpers and then let them go, opening yourself to the direct kinesthetic sense of clear, fresh, lovingness pervading your body and being.

It may be that you wish to stop with this first *inward* phase of the practice — it's a simple and beautiful way to restore yourself. But once you've opened into this deeper wholeness, you may wish to continue by offering it to others.

## **2. The Offering**

Again you will use the miracle of breath to invoke and direct the healing field, this time to a person or a series of people (one at a time), or to a situation in the world that cries out for healing. Begin in the same way as the inward phase: on your in-breath welcoming into your body the clear, fresh, spacious presence, or safety, or loving light — however it feels to you — and on the out-breath allow that loving light to envelope the one in need of healing.

You might want to silently say their name as you do this, or envision them, or invoke their presence in a less verbal or visual way. Often this “sending” of healing love is conceived transactionally — that we’re “beaming” the healing light to that person, that a stream of light is being sent from our heart to that person. I don’t think this image will do any harm, but it does create the sense that “we” are doing something “to” them, which isn’t what’s happening. We’re evoking the healing field that it may envelope and pervade them. This is a subtle business, but after a while you’ll get a sense of it. You’re simply opening your consciousness to the person in need, and then letting the healing breath do the rest.

If you know the person in need, and they’re open to it, you might suggest they do the first inward phase of the healing breath while you offer the offering. You might arrange for this to happen simultaneously, or just let it occur at different times.

You can also “direct” this offering of healing to strangers — someone you pass in the street or who you see is having a hard time, or to any number of painful tragedies in the world.

### ***A Final Thought***

Does any of this matter? What if there is no discernible change in a person’s health following our prayer, or in the violence and ignorance we witness in the world? I remember this question came up some years ago on one of our forest walks in northern Thailand. A group of us from a number of Asian and European countries had come to bear witness to the struggle for cultural survival and land rights of the *Pagayaw* indigenous tribe. We were camped on a hill above a remote village, and in the evening we sat in a circle along with several *Pagayaw* elders, praying like this for the well-being of the people and the land. After some time of silent and spoken prayer, one of our party asked if this kind of prayer really made any difference.

One of the elders responded, “You people have come from all over the world. Our people are suffering, and you’ve come to our land to pray for us. Does it make a difference? Imagine if you never came, if you never offered us your prayers. What would that world be like? Yes, it makes a difference.”