

Testing Limitations *by Jaq D Hawkins*

When one thinks of magical healing, it is not unusual to immediately think of Wiccans. The Wiccan traditions often focus on healing rituals, for individual ills or for the planet, and do not hesitate to point that out to the general public as part of their public relations work.

Magicians of all sorts are also capable of performing healing rituals. Healing is as old as time itself. For many years the Christian religions have pointed to examples in the Bible and have performed healings through various methods, even going so far as to stage pre-arranged 'healings' in revival tents to gain the confidence of their audiences.

Some may argue that this is entirely a 'confidence game', but in some cases the staged 'healings' have led to genuine results among the members of the audience who believed in the power of their religion to heal them. A psychologist would say that this is a result of the power of the mind over the body. This is at least partially true, yet there is evidence to suggest that the magic of healing another person is inherent in every human being regardless of their personal beliefs.

How a person goes about channeling this ability into practical use can vary from concentration through ritual to calling upon an outside force to work through them, or even to concentrating their own personal energy through their hands or a medium such as a gemstone to the person in need of assistance. The results are the same. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

Particular individuals are occasionally credited with a special talent for healing. Whether this is because of an inherent talent in the person, or simply a matter of that person having discovered how to direct a natural ability, is something which is largely open to opinion at present. My personal view is that, at least to a large extent, the art of healing can be learned just like any other magical practice.

In my magical experience, the group healings I have witnessed or participated in have been among Wiccans. Ceremonial magicians seem to generally focus on self-transformation or changes to be made in the material world. These group healings have always been to help a person who is suffering from some minor illness, such as a particularly bad viral infection. I have seen notices in Pagan newsletters asking for good thoughts and rituals to be sent toward individuals with more serious illnesses, but I have yet to see anyone seriously tackle terminal or debilitating conditions. Why is that?

True, one hears rumors of individuals attempting to use magic to help a loved one with such a condition on occasion, generally followed by a heartfelt obituary. I'm going to wade into this one way over my head and ask why we don't hear about success stories.

One hears through the media about spontaneous remissions of cancer which baffle doctors. The inevitable trip to my local library which this subject has incited has led to confirmation of what I have heard in occasional rumors over many years. Looking under "healing" in the subject index, two volumes found their way into my hands. *Love, Medicine and Miracles* by Bernie S. Siegel, M.D. (Harper & Row, New York, 1986), is written by a physician who has observed over many years of practice that patients with positive attitudes are far more likely to recover from serious illnesses than those who have given up. This would seem self-evident, but bears direct reading of case histories.

Healing, and the Mind by Bill Myers (Doubleday, New York, 1979), is written by a journalist who interviews several people, especially physicians, about the phenomenon of the mind's effect on the healing process. One of the notable messages in this book is the difference between curing and healing. A physician can only cure the body to a limited extent. It is the body which heals itself with the help of the physician, who creates the best possible conditions for the body to do so.

It seems that as magicians, we should be able to influence such a phenomenon in our own way. Medical treatments should be followed as far as they are able to help, but we should be able to give our loved ones some assistance in the act of healing themselves. This may only be a matter of giving them the confidence they need to give it their best try, or perhaps the act of actually giving them the strength. Perhaps not all positive-attitude patients can heal themselves, but we don't really know. Spontaneous remissions are something that medical science is still unable to explain. My theory is that if it can happen, it should be possible to find the way to MAKE it happen.

People reading this who have faced serious illness in themselves or loved ones may find my speculations offensive. Who am I to conjecture over something which hasn't touched me personally? Yet it is through this sort of conjecture that I hope to bring this subject out of the realms of taboo. A problem cannot be solved if people are afraid to talk about it.

Something I have observed in the attitude of magical people who send their "good thoughts" to a seriously ill person, is that all that seems to be expected is that it may help the person to suffer a bit less. No serious magic user I have ever known has claimed the ability to cure a terminal illness. Yet one occasionally hears of 'miracle healers' who actually do effect such cures, acting with complete confidence. These healers are often debunked as coincidentally performing a healing on someone who "would have had a spontaneous remission anyway", or ignored because there are many more con artists making false claims and using skills than genuine healers. Genuine healings make the news for a day and are forgotten.

What I have observed among pagans and magicians in general is that they tend to be very sensitive people ... the sort of people who would not want to give false hope to a friend who is ill by claiming the ability to do something which they have never tried. Any attempt to ease the suffering of the friend is likely to be prefaced by something like, I don't know if this will help any, but..."

If we never try to take on a challenge, how will we ever know if it can be done? Perhaps instead of approaching the subject from the position of acknowledging our limitations, we could attempt healings as magical experiments. Perhaps instead of "I don't know if this will help..." we could say, "I haven't tried this before, so let's see what happens." As long as conventional medical treatment is not abandoned for the experiment, and as long as no money changes hands, certainly no harm could come from an impersonal experiment.

Some may argue that it would give the patient false hope, but then, what is there for a person with a terminal disease except hope? And just think, what if it was successful? Without acknowledging the possibility of success, there wouldn't be any point in trying. Just like any magical operation, certainty of failure is a guarantee of that failure, as is lust of result.

The only solo personal healing I have ever performed was successful, but was not on a seriously ill person. It was a matter of preventing postoperative pain for a loved one, an easy thing to explain away. The ritual was approached with exactly the same attitude which I used in a previous ritual to correct a problem with my VCR. I have no more electronic knowledge than medical knowledge. That ritual was also successful. The analogy may seem difficult, but the point is that what keeps many magical people from giving their full potential to a healing ritual for a terminal patient is the price of failure. If we could treat it as any other ritual, our chances for success would be much higher.

I would very much like to hear from anyone who has participated in successful healings of serious illnesses, including self-healings. Write to me using my contact form. Perhaps success stories in a future article will help to demonstrate that magic doesn't have to accept limitations.