



# Energy Healing: A Pathway to Inner Growth

## with Jim Gilkeson

DOWNLOADABLE ARTICLES AND EXERCISES FOR THE ENERGY HEALER  
from the pages of the  
*Energy Healing: A Pathway to Inner Growth Newsletter*  
<http://www.jimgilkeson.com>

## HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF ENERGY HEALING

*The following is a reflection on the fact energy healing is not something that was just invented in California in the seventies. On the contrary, it has a long history and not a few interesting documented milestones. Of particular interest to me is the ironic story of the investigation of the work of Franz Anton Mesmer, especially considering the obvious parallels with present-day efforts to place energy healing under conventional scientific scrutiny.*

Subtle energy practices are next of kin to meditation and the myriads of spiritual practices which have been passed down through history. As such, they put us in contact with the universe and the world of spirit, something larger than any of us. For that reason, though clearly there are varying levels of experience among us, I believe it is wise to cultivate a certain egalitarian attitude about it. No one of us has “invented” energywork. Nor have our teachers, nor their teachers. We are all heirs to the legacy of the spiritual quest of humanity.

As part of that legacy, we have inherited an evolving language as well. An interesting history of energywork could be organized around the language and metaphors used to describe the processes of healing, blessing, and spiritual unfoldment. Art and architecture, especially sacred art and the architecture of sacred sites, have always reflected features of the human energy field. The haloes, flames, rays, glories and nimbuses of light arrayed around the bodies of the saints and gods of all traditions attest to this. Traditional temples and cathedrals were built in specific geometrical configurations to accommodate the energetic needs of the aspiring soul.

Language—that cauldron of transformation—will continue to change as our appreciation of sub-

tle energies evolves. In my opinion, one of the challenges that healers have to accept is the communication task implicit in their work, and that means jumping into the cauldron. The challenge has to do with the fact that language can only point to something, but never fully contain it.

The language of earlier “energywork,” now archaic in modern ears, was nevertheless inventive, and it reflected the worldview of those using it. In all early cultures, reference has been made to a universal life force which enlivens all creation and all beings. The Hindu/Vedic term *prana*, and the Chinese word *ch'i* both refer to the life force, which provides the substance and the formative power of creation, the food and the patterns of growth. The Hebrew alphabet is made of flames, as God is said, in the book of Genesis, to have spoken the Creation into existence. Words and language are vehicles of the Creative Fire of God. The translators of the Bible commissioned by King James put the word “virtue” in Jesus’ mouth when he spoke of the healing energy which left him when the woman touched the hem of his garment. The “royal touch” was at one time considered to be the special divine grace believed to be given solely to kings for transferring

healing power. Franz Anton Mesmer, a Viennese physician who lived in the eighteenth century, from whose name we have the word “mesmerism,” healed with what he called “animal magnetism.” His followers, as well as those of Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophist School, referred to themselves as “fluidists,” after their teaching of a magnetic fluid which passed from them to those they healed. All of these examples point to knowledge of a life force.

The shift from a religious/spiritual understanding of the world to a scientific one has shown in the language of subtle energy practice. Electrical metaphors abound in modern-day descriptions of the human energy system. There is a good deal of talk in some energywork and esoteric spiritual circles about “vibratory rates,” the “circuitry” of the human energy system, and the “train of power” (as vibratory rates are “stepped down” or “stepped up” in their frequency, as if by a transformer); students in schools of spiritual growth might speak of being “rewired,” as their nervous systems become cultured to accommodate “higher vibratory rates.”

Attempts at registering the energy field by instrumental means date at least as far back as 1911 when the British doctor Walter Kilner published *The Human Atmosphere: Or the Aura Made Visible by the Aid of Chemical Screens*, Health Research (1977), which documented his experiments with dicyanin screens. These influenced the range of vibration that the eye could sense. With this technique, he claimed to be able to detect irregularities and blockage in the energy field. Electronic photography, of which the most famous form is Kirlian photography, can image patterns of energy emanating from a body. Kirlian photographs of the hands of healers during a healing session show fingertips wreathed in spikey emanations of light. Electronic photographs of couples reveal patterns of energy movement between them: the better their communication, the more harmonious and complete the patterns of light filaments in the energetic bridge between them. Kirlian photography was used in Dumitrescu’s interesting demonstration of the holographic nature of the energetic matrix of a leaf. A hole was cut in a leaf, after which the leaf was electronically photographed. The electronic image in the missing part of the leaf was of a whole leaf, itself with a small hole. Ostensibly, a close examination of the electronic image of the hole would

have revealed yet another whole leaf image with a hole in it. The part held within itself the image of the whole leaf. (Cited in Richard Gerber’s *Vibrational Medicine: New Choices for Healing Ourselves*, Bear & Company, Santa Fe, 1988.)

#### DR. MESMER AND THE GLAS HARMONICA

The case of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) deserves some attention. In Mesmer’s story, we have a rather well-documented and interesting historical instance of the use of subtle energies for healing. In addition, he was a highly visible figure in Europe at a time when science was overtaking religion as the dominant worldview. His career as a physician and healer, and his eventual denunciation by the scientific community as a charlatan, prefigure some of the lack of understanding and sympathy that exists today between the conventional and alternative healthcare communities.

In Mozart’s comic opera “Cosi fan tutti,” there is a scene in which two characters take poison and collapse, dying, on the stage. A man impersonating a doctor enters and produces a huge magnet from the folds of his cape. With it, he makes “passes” over the afflicted bodies, which revives them. The opera’s first audiences cheer with recognition, knowing that this is Mozart’s playful spoof of the flamboyant Dr. Mesmer, whose cures using “animal magnetism” have made him wildly famous across the continent and led to his appointment as the physician to Marie Antoinette of France.

Mesmer was a Viennese physician, a wealthy patron of the arts, and patron to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the boy-genius who created the opera with the comic send-up of his work. Mesmer was himself musical. He played the cello and the glass harmonica, old instrument improved upon by the American scientist and inventor, Benjamin Franklin.

Mozart’s parody reflected Mesmer’s actual work. It was founded on his belief in “animal magnetism,” a vital force or “fluid.” A deficiency of animal magnetism resulted in illnesses of body and mind. Mesmer’s magnetic treatments induced a trance state in patients when the magnetic force was transferred into them by means of “passes” which he made with his hands over afflicted body parts. He performed group treatments as well. Patients, often roped together, held on to magnetic rods protruding from wooden casks filled with magnetized water. Mesmer would enter wearing lilac colored robes,

while they chanted and sang in order to prepare themselves. He would stroke their bodies and the field around them. In their trance, some patients were calmed; others had convulsions, fits of laughing or weeping. Some were healed of their ailments.

In 1784, King Louis XIV of France instituted a commission to investigate Mesmer's work. It was headed by the man who improved on the glass harmonica which Mesmer so enjoyed playing, Benjamin Franklin. At that time, Franklin was the American Minister to France. Being elderly, he was a nominal member of the commission, but a very prestigious one because of his name as a scientist. Other members included Dr. Antoine Lavoisier, father of modern chemistry, and Dr. Guillotin, inventor of a new, humane method of capitol punishment. History reminds us that King Louis XIV was himself beheaded.

The purpose of the Commission was to put animal magnetism to scientific test. If it were real, then it would stand up to rational scrutiny. Commission members witnessed the full range of mesmeric phenomena and established that cures had indeed taken place. The cures were not questioned so much as the mechanisms behind them.

Mesmer's paraphernalia was tested but no magnetism was found. The Mesmerist who was tested (not Mesmer himself) argued that the magnetic forces were too subtle to be detected and their existence could only be deduced from their effects. All members of the Commission were themselves magnetized. They believed that if this "magnetism" were indeed physical, then they would be able to feel it passing into them, but they didn't feel it. They concluded that the cures arose solely from the imagination of the patients, and Mesmer was denounced as a charlatan. One minority report by the botanist Dr. Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu expressed the conviction that there must be something in this induced trance state that brought about these miraculous cures, if only in that the imaginations of the patients had been mobilized. Benjamin Franklin endorsed the majority report but expressed fascination at the notion that what a person believes could induce a bodily effect.

#### IS SUBTLE ENERGY A METAPHOR?

I'm sure that Larry Dossey M.D. rattled a number of cages when he suggested that "subtle energy" might be a metaphor ("The Forces of Healing: Reflections on Energy, Consciousness and the Beef Stroganoff Principle," *Alternative Therapies*, September, 1997). Obviously, most practitioners of complimentary and alternative medicine would be loathe to abandon their literal belief in "subtle energies." Asking them to do so would create as much resistance as asking most scientists to abandon their literal belief in what has been scientifically demonstrated. I haven't run into many scientists who believe "science" is a metaphor. At least not among the kind of scientist who is entranced by a science of proofs and the prediction and control of outcomes. I see this in clear contrast to a more open-ended science of exploration and discovery.

I have watched people with scientific backgrounds, seeking to incorporate subtle energy practices into their work, squirm and writhe when their personal experiences start to go outside of what can be proven scientifically. It seems that their first impulse is to attempt to make what goes on in the healer's experience appetizing to science, and they get caught in a web of translation problems, lacking adequate language and metaphors.

If notions of "healing energies," "subtle energies," are constructs and metaphors, then they are at least very useful ones in as far as they point to something beyond themselves. Fortunately, there are scientist/mystics, as well as healer/mystics and alternative therapist/mystics who are not so stuck in the flat literalness of beliefs about subtle energies that they forget that words, and even "hard facts" are transitory and not fully up to the job of containing the mysteries of life. It is my belief that no matter what kind of model we are using, whether scientific or un-, subtle energetic, demonstrable and proven in the eyes of certain people or not, intuitive or counter-, these are ultimately all metaphors, tokens of bigger realities, and therefore vehicles for moving us beyond our present experience.

© by James Gilkeson, 2001-2009. All rights reserved.