

What about Faith Healings

Perhaps the most interesting part of placebos is that, in many cases, the belief in effectiveness of the placebo actually yields physiological responses. Does that mean that being healed by faith is nothing more than the placebo effect? Perhaps the answer to this question is both yes and no. To examine this phenomenon further let's first identify what we know.

What we know

The human body seems to prefer being healthy over being sick and it has a remarkable capacity for healing itself. However, as determined from placebo studies, sometimes that capacity for healing must be triggered. This implies that the "self-healing" of the body can be repressed until an external force stimulates it (i.e. sudden belief change). If the body prefers health, why is the capacity to self-heal sometimes repressed? In addition, there seems to be a limit to the healing capacity of the body because bodies cannot prevent aging, and often do not recover from illnesses.

The Faith Spectrum

Perhaps the way to view faith as it relates to the placebo effect is to discuss it within a spectrum. On one end of the spectrum are things that the body can "heal" if the repressive effects are released (i.e. skin rash). Placebos would be very effective on this end of the spectrum. On the other end of the spectrum are things that the body could not heal, even if exhaustive attempts to release the repressive effects are tried (i.e. blind at birth). On this end of the spectrum placebos are ineffective. In contrast, faith seems to be able to effectively span both spectrums, healing skin rashes and blindness. Thus, faith could be seen as a powerful external force that acts to release the repressive effects of the body (i.e. acting as a placebo) and also as a conduit to channel additional power needed to repair the body when the natural capacities have been exhausted. This latter spectrum appears to be dependent on two other factors in addition to belief: worthiness and God's will. Since this additional power to heal is God's to command, just having faith (belief) and worthiness does not ensure the power can be accessed. This balance between the two spectrums is perhaps best described by Brigham Young who, when a person requested a priesthood blessing, would ask, "Have you used any remedies?" To those who said no because, "we wish the Elders to lay hands upon us, and we have faith that we shall be healed", President Young replied: "That is very inconsistent according to my faith. If we are sick, and ask the Lord to heal us, and to do all for us that is necessary to be done, according to my understanding of the Gospel of salvation, I might as well ask the Lord to cause my wheat and corn to grow, without my plowing the ground and casting in the seed. It appears consistent to me to apply every remedy that comes within the range of my knowledge, and [then] to ask my Father in Heaven to sanctify that application to the healing of my body. He then clarifies by stating: Of course we don't wait until all other methods are exhausted before we pray in faith or give priesthood blessings for healing. In emergencies, prayers and blessings come first. Most often we pursue all efforts simultaneously".

Faith as a belief

On either spectrum (skin rash or blindness), having belief is a crucial element. "Faith is essential for healing by the powers of heaven" (Dallin H. Oaks). President Kimball remarked: "The need of faith is often underestimated. The ill one and the family often seem to depend wholly on the power of the priesthood and the gift of healing that they hope the administering brethren may have, whereas the greater responsibility is with him who is blessed. The major element is

the faith of the individual when that person is conscious and accountable. Too frequent administrations may be an indication of lack of faith or of the ill one trying to pass the responsibility for faith development to the elders rather than self. He told about a faithful sister who received a priesthood blessing. When asked the next day if she wished to be administered to again, she replied: "No, I have been anointed and administered to. The ordinance has been performed. It is up to me now to claim my blessing through my faith." Perhaps a healing miracle can be performed to increase one's faith. Consider the New Testament story of the man who brought his son to Christ to be healed? Christ told him that all things are possible to those that believe. The man then replied: "Yea Lord, I believe". Then, perhaps noticing that he was caught in his guile, continues, "Help thou mine unbelief." Did this man have enough faith for his son to be healed, or are there times when miracles and healings are actually used to build our faith?

Faith and worthiness

President Nelson observed: "Well, brethren, in like manner, I fear that there are too many men who have been given the authority of the priesthood but who lack priesthood power because the flow of power has been blocked by sins such as laziness, dishonesty, pride, immorality, or preoccupation with things of the world. I fear that there are too many priesthood bearers who have done little or nothing to develop their ability to access the powers of heaven. I worry about all who are impure in their thoughts, feelings, or actions or who demean their wives or children, thereby cutting off priesthood power. I fear that too many have sadly surrendered their agency to the adversary and are saying by their conduct, "I care more about satisfying my own desires than I do about bearing the Savior's power to bless others." I fear, brethren, that some among us may one day wake up and realize what power in the priesthood really is and face the deep regret that they spent far more time seeking power over others or power at work than learning to exercise fully the power of God. President George Albert Smith taught that "we are not here to while away the hours of this life and then pass to a sphere of exaltation; but we are here to qualify ourselves day by day for the positions that our Father expects us to fill hereafter." Why would any man waste his days and settle for Esau's mess of pottage when he has been entrusted with the possibility of receiving all of the blessings of Abraham? I urgently plead with each one of us to live up to our privileges as bearers of the priesthood. In a coming day, only those men who have taken their priesthood seriously, by diligently seeking to be taught by the Lord Himself, will be able to bless, guide, protect, strengthen, and heal others. Only a man who has paid the price for priesthood power will be able to bring miracles to those he loves and keep his marriage and family safe, now and throughout eternity."

Faith within Gods will

"Young men and older men, please take special note of what I will say now. As we exercise the undoubted power of the priesthood of God and as we treasure His promise that He will hear and answer the prayer of faith, we must always remember that faith and the healing power of the priesthood cannot produce a result contrary to the will of Him whose priesthood it is". (Dallin H. Oaks). If we are not careful, this concept can be a bit of a conundrum and perhaps a crutch to those who lack faith. "I prayed, but my prayer wasn't answered so it must not be God's will". Perhaps it is our responsibility to seek out the will of God before requesting blessings. What about giving a blessing? How do we first quiet our minds to understand God's will? And in the many cases where His will is not made clear, how can we proceed with confidence and full expectation that the pronounced blessing will be honored?

Faith as a Gift

Finally, how do spiritual gifts play into this? Unto some it is given the power to heal, and to others the power to be healed. Are these spiritual gifts a direct manifestation of one's faith, or do some people simply have increased power to heal? Can (should) all members seek out these gifts through a lifetime of prayer and fasting?



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