

ABOUT PLACEBOS

by Serge Kahili King

QUESTION: What do you think about using placebos in healing?

ANSWER: Since I believe that all healing comes from within, my personal opinion is that all healing techniques and procedures - physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual - are placebos. However, let's discuss this from a more common viewpoint.

In today's world a placebo is usually thought of as something you give to or do to or do for a sick person that is, as said in an article on Wikipedia, "a simulated or otherwise medically ineffectual treatment for a disease or other medical condition intended to deceive the recipient." Of course, this is the viewpoint of conventional medicine. In the book, "Science and Secrets of Early Medicine," author Jürgen Thorwald, in writing about ancient healing methods, says, "Clearly, sacrifice, magical rites, and exorcisms were a major aspect of Inca medicine. But a group of real healers also existed."

Outside of the viewpoint of conventional medicine, a placebo is often thought of as any non-medical means by which a healer can facilitate a healing. In this view, placebos are not used to deceive a patient, but to promote a healing. The effectiveness of placebos is so evident that even conventional medical practitioners have to reluctantly admit that placebos can account for somewhere around 37% of all cures by their count. That number can be misleading, however, because a lot depends on how placebos are presented. Factors that can greatly increase or reduce that percentage are the attitude of the patient, the attitude of the health practitioner, and the appearance of the placebo itself.

The "real healers" in ancient cultures may have been those wise enough to combine sacrifice, magical rites, exorcisms, and certain plants in addition to practices more familiar to modern doctors, such as herbs and surgery, in order to increase the the possibility of a cure as much as possible.

Apparently, some modern medical practices may not be nearly as effective as placebos. In cases of cancer, it is common for doctors to say at some point that chemotherapy may provide the patient with a 50-50 percent chance of recovery. Out of fear and/or intimidation, most patients will opt for chemotherapy, but the 50-50 chance is really saying that both chemotherapy and placebos stand an equal chance of providing a cure. The situation with this specific condition and treatment may be even worse than that. An Australian study published in the Journal of Clinical Oncology Volume 16, Issue 8, December 2004, pages 549-560, says that the percentage of survival five years after chemotherapy treatment was only 3%. Even placebos ought to be able to do better than that.

To conclude this rant, I think the healing is more important than the method, so use whatever works for the problem and the person involved.