

# Instructor Offers Reward For Proof Occult Healing Works

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Holistic health is big in Santa Cruz, and a local psychology instructor has offered a big, healthy reward to anyone who can prove some of the more occult techniques work the way their practitioners say they do.

Andy Neher, an instructor at Cabrillo College, says he will give \$2,000 to anybody who can show the philosophies behind such outre therapies or diagnostic methods as iridology, polarity, homeopathy, reflexology or dowsing have anything to do with what benefits they might bestow.

He doesn't deny there may be benefits.

"As a matter of fact, my interest in extraordinary experience, particularly in healing, stems from a desire to understand the processes involved, because I think they are sometimes extremely powerful.

"I think occult healers, or fringe healers, often tap powerful psychological processes that folk healers in other cultures seem to be able to tap. My interest is in understanding those processes so they can be integrated — or reintegrated — into mainstream medical practice and psychotherapy."

The approaches with which Neher takes issue include iridology, the diagnosis of disease by changes in the eye's iris; reflexology, a therapy system using pressure points different from those in acupressure; polarity therapy, which postulates an electro-magnetic field which is balanced or imbalanced; homeopathy, in which solutions of plants which produce symptoms similar to the disease being treated are diluted to a point at which virtually none of the plant material is left, and the solution — plain water, chemically — is ingested by the patient, and applied kinesiology, which postulates a weakness in an internal organ will show up as a weakness in some corresponding muscle.

He and his students have tested most of the approaches over the years, he says, and he has yet to find anything other than basic psychological processes at work.

When the experimenters control the psychological processes, the healing techniques no longer work.

The two processes which are "biggies," he says are the placebo effect and physical contact.

Placebos involve a conditioned response, he says. The Russian physiologist, Pavlov, and his dogs are often associated with this phenomenon. Pavlov discovered in the early 20th Century that if he rang a bell while feeding dogs, eventually the dogs would salivate when the bell was rung, even though no food was present.

"The placebo is a conditioned stimulus," according to Neher. "It could be anything — a word, a pill — and this stimulus elicits an involuntary healing response that could be the inhibition of pain receptors or transmission, or it could be the activation of the immune system's response."

Research on animals now shows that experimenters can elicit healing responses in animals through such conditioning, Neher says.

"There is another thing I think is involved, and that is the effects of touch, of physical contact. Again, a lot of research shows it can have a powerful impact.

"Recent research on rocking, for instance, shows its impact (in children) on the development of the nervous system. Touch enters into many of the occult healing practices and it seems to calm the body. It relieves stress, and dozens and dozens of illnesses are stress-induced."

Touch is also a conditioned stimulus, he says. We learn early that touch means love, acceptance and affection, and the touch of a "healer" elicits positive reactions because of this.

"However, the people who practice these approaches don't talk about either of these two mechanisms, by and large. Their language is things like 'energy flow' — that's a biggie — and 'pressure' and 'polarities.' And as far as I know, there's no evidence those processes exist in the way they describe them."

Maruti Seidman, who teaches polarity therapy at Santa Cruz' Twin Lakes College of the Healing Arts, describes polarity as "energy balancing." It promotes deep relaxation and revitalization, he says, through a series of "manipulations, stretching, rocking, wiggling, pressure points and relief points.

"It focuses one's being," he says, "into a clear channel for love energy."

Seidman can't describe what "love energy" is, he says — "It's just something that you know. Your intuition has to guide you...The mind has taken over the workings of the body, and polarity tries to turn the mind off and let the love energy of God come through...It's something that's very ambiguous for the person that doesn't believe."

He stresses that polarity practitioners do not view themselves as healers, but as catalysts.

"Through the diet, manipulations, the people getting in touch with who they are get in touch with their balance. The people heal themselves," he says.

A recent cover story in a local publication was about holistic health in Santa Cruz, and Neher wrote a letter to the publication offering his \$2,000 reward.

When Seidman saw that letter, "Part-

of me thought, 'Gee — this guy is really reaching out to be healed.'

He is considering taking him up on the offer.

"If you study Randolph Stone, the father of polarity, in his books he clearly defines what's happening and why it's happening," Seidman says.

Neher disagrees.

"Polarity therapy is incredibly naive," he says. "Randolph Stone is contradictory, he's illogical — he's incredible. Anybody who wants to evaluate it, all they have to do is read him."

Neher says, however, that processes may be going on in holistic healing other

than those presently known to be beneficial and efficacious — good diet, exercise, stress relief, the power of suggestion, touch and the placebo effect.

"I'm sure there are some other processes involved. Whether they turn out to be paranormal, meaning going against our current understanding and assumptions of the world, I doubt. It's unlikely, if I had to place a bet."

Acupuncture, he says, is the only system he's tested that gave positive results. Using electrical resistance at various points on subject's ears to diagnose conditions "matched up more than would be expected on the basis of chance.

"I would assign it about a 50-50 probability as being caused by some process we don't understand"

The other systems — polarity, reflexology, orgone therapy and biorhythms — test out "exactly zero," he says. "Biorhythms seem to be total balderdash."

His offer has some stipulations. He suggests or approves a pilot study which will be scientifically valid. If it works out, he will take part in a larger study, "to make sure everything is done right.

"If that one works out, then the prize is theirs."

There are other prerogatives: If it is a healing process, "I would want to

participate in the dissemination of the good news. It would be so spectacular a finding, we'd want to get the word out."

He attaches one other stipulation to tests of other paranormal phenomena for which he also offers the reward — clairvoyance, extrasensory perception or precognition.

If the results of these tests are only slightly better than random chance, that's more than enough to win at a game of chance.

"I get to go with that person to Nevada," he says, tongue in cheek, and we'll make a million dollars."