Healthy Thoughts, Healthy Bodies

Many in Unity relate to the principle “thoughts held in mind produce after their kind,” also known as the Law of Mind Action. Some take this to mean that we have the power to heal ourselves of illnesses. But does it also mean we attract illnesses by the activity of our thoughts?

By Arturo Mora

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.’ Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, ‘Take heart, daughter. Your faith has made you well’ (Mt. 9:22).

When Paul Hasselbeck, D.D.S., was diagnosed with HIV in 1987, doctors told him he’d be dead within two years. That was in the early days of the HIV epidemic, years before the availability of antiretroviral drug regimens that prevent the virus from developing into AIDS. Most patients faced bleak outcomes.

But Hasselbeck, now a minister and dean of Spiritual Education and Enrichment at Unity Institute® and Seminary and host of Metaphysical Romp on Unity Online Radio (www.unityonlineradio.org), was not like most patients.

“When he first put me on the new meds, my doctor said, ‘You are doing better than all my other (HIV) patients, what are you doing differently?’”

I said, “I pray and meditate regularly.”

By using spiritual tools to create a mind-body connection—including “negotiating” with his HIV cells to create a “state of peace”—and in conjunction with the best medical advice and treatments, Hasselbeck has kept his HIV levels undetectable. He is a living example of the Law of Mind Action—also known as the Law of Attraction—applied to physical healing.

A Spectrum of Beliefs

Most in Unity know this law as, “Thoughts held in mind produce after their kind,” a phrase coined by Unity minister Rev. Martha Giudici
“The way the doctor explained it (is) ‘your immune system attacks your body, it’s attacking your joints.’ I thought, That is a perfect match, how genius of me to create this disease.”
—Laura Shepard

in the 1960s, and said to be based on the principles in Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore’s 1909 book *Christian Healing*, as well as Myrtle Fillmore’s healing work.

The law holds that we create our reality through our thoughts. Everything in the manifest realm has its beginning in thought, whether it be health, prosperity or relationships.

“There is a wide spectrum of belief within Unity on how the Law of Mind Action operates,” says Rev. Robert Brumet, a faculty member at Unity Institute. “At one extreme is the belief that thoughts cause every ailment that happens to us. At the other end of the spectrum is the belief that thoughts are only a contributing factor—there are many other factors that may be at work.”

Charles Fillmore saw a cause-and-effect relationship. “A majority of the ills that afflict the body have their origin in erroneous thoughts about life,” he wrote.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Shepherd, professor of Historical and Theological Studies at the Institute, said Unity has evolved since the early days. He does not see healing in the same absolute language as the Fillmores often did.

“Life experience shows many diseases don’t begin with what you’re thinking,” he said. “A 4-year-old child with leukemia, for example. And there are people in perfect health, and yet they have unhealthy thoughts, so thinking and health status doesn’t always correlate.”

“Charles Fillmore grew up in the 19th century,” Shepherd said. “They were excited about books like *The Mental Cure* by Warren Felt Evans, which showed it was possible to overcome seemingly incurable diseases. It was the age of Newtonian physics—cause and effect. Their passion for science made early New Thought describe itself as ‘the Christian sciences.’”

Myrtle, in fact, claimed to have cured herself of tuberculosis using the power of mind through prayer. “When she got that diagnosis,” Shepherd said, “it was more or less a death sentence. Entire communities were decimated by tuberculosis at that time. … These principles worked for the Fillmores and others. People affirmed health and got better.”

Hasselbeck feels that the cause and effect may not be direct, but there is still a mind-body relationship at work. “(Charles) Fillmore fully believed that when the mind is cleared of its errors, then the body would respond in a positive way,” Hasselbeck said. “I think we have moved beyond that idea, in that it is our error thoughts that contribute to illness, but do not cause it. When we have erroneous thinking, our bodies physiologically respond by affecting our immune system, which makes us more susceptible to disease.”

While Revs. Brumet, Hasselbeck and Shepherd may express a more nuanced relationship between our thoughts and our health, there are others who see a more direct relationship.

Laura Shepard, who co-hosted the Unity Online Radio program *Absolute Living* with Rev. Ellen Deenport, spoke in a segment titled “Another Look at Health” about her personal experience with an autoimmune form of arthritis. “The way the doctor explained it,” she said, “your immune system attacks your body, it’s attacking your joints. I thought, That is a perfect match, how genius of me to create this disease … You think, How crazy can a body be to attack itself, and then I thought, That’s what goes on in my consciousness, this is the dis-ease of my perfectionism. I am constantly attacking myself for not being perfect … It’s such a match to my consciousness that it’s laughable.”

She now sees the experience as a sort of learning gift. “It points me to the emotional pain that is the cause of the physical pain,” she said, “and I am questioning the thinking that is behind the physical manifestation.”

**Metaphysical Malpractice**

If it’s true that illness begins with thought, isn’t that blaming the victim for the disease, implying that they’re sick because of their “bad” thoughts? If it isn’t working for you, are you doing something wrong?

“That’s just metaphysical malpractice,” said Hasselbeck. “Was Jesus doing something wrong in his consciousness that got him crucified? Was Jesus doing something wrong that got him persecuted?”

The Fillmores emphasized prayer, meditation, denials and affirmations as ways of healing such “error thoughts” of the mind, and in turn curing the body. The real goal of this inner work was to remember the perfection, the omnipotent presence we call God, which is within us. By freeing ourselves of “error thoughts”—negative thinking that we are separate from God in any way—we achieve greater unity with that presence, and greater health.

“(This) is not a miraculous change that takes place in man,” Fillmore wrote in *Christian Healing*. “It is the establishment in his consciousness of that which has always existed as the perfect-man idea in Divine Mind.”

For the Fillmores, however, the Law of Mind Action was not just a mystical practice with no relation to real life. The
goal, wrote Myrtle, was to “assimilate and make use of the life of Spirit through our thoughts, our words, our acts, our living habits.” Cleansing thoughts lead to better choices about food and exercise.

Did the Fillmores go too far in promising concrete results from this work? Does the Law of Mind Action always work? After all, even people with positive attitudes sometimes get sick.

Rev. Shepherd thinks more recent science, not available to the Fillmores, sheds light on the matter. Quantum physics shows that atoms operate not according to absolute laws but by statistical probabilities. There is no certainty that an action will lead to a certain result, only aggregate tendencies that result in an average result.

“Many of the early Unity teachers talked about spiritual principles as being laws: if you do this, it must have this effect. In Newtonian Law, dominant when Unity began, that’s the case,” Shepherd said. “However, from a quantum physics model, if you affirm health, you will tend to be healthier. Does that mean you’ll never get cancer? No.

“A better term for the process would be the Principle of Mind Action,” Shepherd said, “not the Law of Mind Action. If you stay centered in Truth, affirming the positive outcome, you will enhance your overall quality of life. It will likely happen in the aggregate, even if in individual instances it might not work.”

Myrtle Fillmore wrote in Healing Letters, “Sometimes we become so intent upon some outer form of success that we keep our eyes fixed upon the partial good. Sometimes that which we undertake does not progress as we had dreamed, and we are tempted to see walls of limitation.”

The Law of Mind Action was never intended to encourage attachment to a specific outcome. If we look for the deeper meaning behind it, we can see that our fulfillment may come in ways not originally imagined, but enriching nevertheless.

There is value, far beyond any limited expectations, in following the Law of Mind Action’s precepts of positive thought and positive living. When fully integrated as a way of life, it can lead to a more harmonic, complete health, an awakening to the truth that we are one with our divine Christ nature.

Unity co-founder Myrtle Fillmore had suffered from tuberculosis and other ailments since childhood. Doctors had given her little hope. “I was supposed to be dying or very close to it,” she wrote. Her outlook about life changed after she attended a lecture by Christian Science practitioner E.B. Weeks in 1886. At the lecture, she heard him affirm, “I am a child of God, and therefore, I do not inherit sickness.” The statement resonated with her, and she began affirming it in her daily prayer practice. By using the affirmation and speaking health to the cells of her body, she wrote in Unity magazine that her ailments “faded away before the dawning of this new consciousness, and I found that my body temple had been literally transformed through the renewing of my mind.”

Word spread about her healing, and before long her neighbors in Kansas City—and then complete strangers—began showing up at her doorstep to request healing prayers. Out of this healing work, the Society of Silent Unity was born, eventually responding to prayer requests received in the mail and by phone. Over the years, the organization was renamed Silent Unity®. Today it receives prayer requests by phone, mail and online. Healing prayers are still the most popular request.

Here is one popular prayer for health:

“The love of God knows no bounds, and as you hold to the truth of God’s love, you know that every condition can be healed. You now release your concerns, and your healing takes place at the right time and in a perfect way. Mighty currents of God’s healing love flow through you now, making you whole and free.”

To request prayer support from Silent Unity, call 1-800-NOW-PRAY (669-7729). Silent Unity prayer associates provide personal prayer response 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Unity co-founder Myrtle Fillmore began “speaking” to the cells of her body, affirming health, a practice that she credited for her healing from tuberculosis.