

THE DEFINITION OF HEALING DEPENDS  
ON HOW ONE DEFINES HEALTH

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SETION HEAD: COMMENTARY

### **The Definition of Healing Depends on How One Defines Health**

**Daniel Benor, MD, ABIHM**

It is a privilege and pleasure to comment on this thoughtful and thought-provoking article. It is wonderfully rich with explorations of the spectrum of meanings and uses for ‘healing’ in biomedical literature, nothing less than I would expect from this thoughtful and thorough author.

Levin addresses the complexities of usages for ‘healing’ in medical dictionaries, textbooks and journals. Here, he finds the primary focus of healing to be a narrow one, addressing physical wound healing. In contrast, the usage in Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) literature addresses healing as an “intervention, an outcome, and a process—or all of these at once.” Levin decries the lack of clarity and specificity in the CAM community in its discussions of healing, citing a very broad range of points of focus within CAM healing. He concludes, “Perhaps a happy medium would be to adopt ‘healing’ for reference to salutogenic processes at all levels of expression of pathophysiological and psychiatric disease, but enforce a moratorium on its use beyond those boundaries.” (p. 21) I can absolutely see where Levin is coming from, as a researcher.

I’ve studied and trained in healing through psychology, medicine, psychiatry (back when psychiatry was primarily psychotherapy), marital and family therapy, spiritual healing (my preferred term for healing through the spectrum of bioenergy/intention/meditation/prayer)<sup>1,2</sup> and varieties of other CAM approaches. I’ve experienced many of these personally for healing of wholistic disharmonies in my life. Among my best teachers have been many clients – who demonstrated their brokenness/ wholistic disharmony and shared their explorations and lessons that led them to places of greater wholeness. Supplementing my clinical experiences have been my collections of wholistic healing research and publications of reviews of CAM,<sup>3,4</sup> spiritual healing,<sup>1,2</sup> and personal spiritual awarenesses.<sup>5</sup> My broad explorations of healing have led me to the understandings I share here about wholistic health and wholistic healing.

My own perspectives are those of a clinician first and researcher second, valuing both as essential in developing and maintaining integrity in healing work. As I see it, in order to address definitions of healing, we have to define what health is – as the basis for how we decide what being unhealthy is, and what healing offers for improving and/or restoring us to states of greater health.

My personal journeys through life, and experiences of helping others as a wholistic psychotherapist to maximize their positive experiences of being alive, is that we are wholistic beings. By this I mean that each of us is, simultaneously and indivisibly, a body, emotions, mind, relationships (with other people and the world at large) and spirit.<sup>6</sup> Each of these levels participates in experiences of being harmoniously whole, which I equate to being healthy, or may contribute to being less than harmoniously whole, which I define as being in a state that is inviting healing.

I’ve come to believe the primary aspect of our being is the spiritual. By spiritual I mean our participation (via psychic/intuitive/Divine aspects of ourselves) in the collective consciousness of mankind and of all other sentience on our planet and in the universe.<sup>7</sup> We have agreed to come into individual, wholistic existence for spiritual lessons.

Informed by results of my practices of healing myself (an ongoing project!), as well as from helping others to heal themselves, and of facilitating their healing, my understanding is that healing is multidimensional, involving every wholistic level of our being. While each level may have its own disharmony that invites healing, all are intimately and inseparably interrelated. Yet in Western society we have fragmented our conceptualizations of our wholistic wholeness. How has this happened?

For the convenience of various professions, Western healing is divided into narrowly focused subspecialties, dealing only with parts of the wholistic spectrum. Here are a few examples of the confusion and misunderstanding this creates.

1. Medical doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and massage therapists address the body. Physical health is considered separately from mental health.
2. Today’s psychiatrists administer medications to change our chemistry, intending to influence our emotions and mind. (Many psychiatrists have training in psychiatric diagnostics but none in psychotherapy – a further degradation of wholistic awareness.)
3. Varieties of psychotherapists help people deal with their mind and emotions.

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