



Mystical Medical Alternativism



JACK RASO

Hundreds of mystical or supernaturalistic health treatment methods have been advanced in recent decades. Here are 31 of them.

The term *alternativism*, which I coined last year, refers to a motley accumulation of movements whose central thesis seems to be: faith, based on common sense, subjective experience, or revelation preempts rational understanding. *Medical alternativism* is composed of three divisions that overlap one another: (1) alternative healthcare; (2) occult medicine; and (3) sectarian religious "healing." The dominant division, alternative healthcare, is a phantasmagoria of systems and methods. Its doctrines posit numerous forms of energy alien to physics; and its overall aims are to make health science a sham and to desecularize healthcare.

The major distinctions of alternative healthcare, vis-à-vis establishmentarian (science-oriented) healthcare, include runaway cross-pollination and a lack of constructive infighting. Since the late 1950s, more than 650



health-related methods—i.e., free-standing methods, multimethod systems, component methods, and general “approaches” that I consider mystical or supernaturalistic—have been subjects of uncritical public discourse (most since 1980).

Broadly, *mysticism* is belief in realities accessible only through subjective experience. *Supernaturalism* is belief in entities or forces that are outside of, yet affect, the universe. The vast majority of the systems and methods of alternative healthcare are mystical or supernaturalistic. It may be cavalier to judge methods solely on the basis of the theories that underlie them, the methods’ contexts, their histories, and the credibility or implausibility of claims for the methods. However, such information furnishes valuable clues, especially when pertinent scientific findings are nonexistent, meager, or discrepant.

Alternative healthcare is a “melting pot” of religion, occultism, folklore, parapsychology, pop psychology, pseudoscience, and medical guesswork. It overflows with theoretical rubbish. In the sprawling, animistic “enchanted forest” of medical alternativism, ideas run hog-wild, words have magical power, illness (“dis-ease”) is an educational opportunity, the impossible is a challenge, wishful thinking is industry, faith is the ticket, and death is a transition.

Below I describe some alternative methods that are mystical or supernaturalistic.

Advanced pranic healing: Subject of a “serious reference work” of the same name, written by chemical engineer and “Master Pranic Healer” Choa Kok Sui. The method allegedly uses “color pranas” and “chakral” techniques to effect “very rapid healing.” It

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includes “divine healing.” Sui is also the author of the bestseller *Pranic Healing* (1990) and his companion piece, *Pranic Psychotherapy* (1993). (See “Pranic psychotherapy,” below.)

Alternative 12 Steps: Nontheistic and purportedly secular variation of the Twelve Steps. The Twelve Steps—e.g., “[We] came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity”—are the basis of such programs as Alcoholics Anonymous. In *The Alternative 12 Steps* (1991), Martha Cleveland, Ph.D., a self-styled atheist/agnostic, and Arlys G., a longtime atheist, define the Twelve Steps as “a program for living, a program of action fueled by spiritual energy” that suggests “a system of holistic healing—a practical system of action” integrating “mind, body and spirit.” Three of the authors’ “Steps” affirmatively mention “spiritual resources” or “spiritual energy.”

Bach flower therapy (Bach flower essence method, Bach flower essence system): Quasi-homeopathic system of pseudodiagnosis and pseudotherapy developed in the 1930s by British physician Edward Bach (1886-1936). (See Lynn McCutcheon, “Bach Flower Remedies: Time to Stop Smelling the Flowers?” *SI*, July-August 1995.) Bach put forth his philosophy in *Heal Thyself: An Explanation of the Real Cause and Cure of Disease*, first published in 1931. Therein he described five “fundamental truths”: (1) Souls, invincible and immortal sparks of the “Almighty,” are the “real,” “Higher” selves of humans. (2) Humanity’s purpose is to develop virtues and wipe out all intrapersonal wrongs. Souls know what circumstances conduce to the perfection of human nature. (3) One’s lifetime is a minuscule part of one’s evolution. (4) When one’s “Soul” and personality are “in harmony,” one is healthy and happy. The straying of the personality from the dictates of the “Soul” is the “root cause” of disease and unhappiness. (5) The “Creator of all things” is “Love,” and everything of which humans are conscious manifests the “Creator.”

Bach held that disease was essentially beneficial and that its design was to

subject the personality to the “Divine will” of the “Soul.” Supposedly, he “psychically” discovered the specific “healing” effects of 38 wildflowers. The “life force” (“soul quality” or “energy wavelength”) of each of these flowers allegedly is transferable to water and thence to humans. Each of the so-called Bach flower remedies is a liquid that supposedly contains a “soul quality” with an affinity to a human “soul quality”; and each vegetable “soul quality” allegedly harmonizes its human counterpart with the “Soul.” The bases of classical “diagnosis” are conversation and intuition. Administration of the “remedies” is usually oral but may be external.

Biological Immunity Analysis™ (BIA, Biological Immunity System™): Companion to nutripathy (see below) developed by Gary A. Martin, D.N., Ph.D., Th.D., D.Sc. BIA, is a “complete holistic system” whose centerpiece is purported deciphering, with the Biological Immunity CompuSystem™, of “Physical-Mental-Emotional frequencies” in specimens of urine and saliva. It allegedly reveals the donor’s “Soul Pattern” (“the pattern inherent in your Soul,” “a gift from God”).

BioSonic Repatterning™: System that encompasses cymatics and toning. Cymatics is “the science of wave phenomena.” Cymatic therapy is an acupressurelike method wherein devices send “beneficial” sound through the skin. Its purported objective is to reestablish “healthy resonance” in tissues. Toning is a vocal method that supposedly brings new “life energy” to “inhibited” or “unbalanced” parts of the body. BioSonic Repatterning also involves using “bija mantras” (“healing mantras” that purportedly activate “elemental energy qualities”) and tuning forks (to produce “Balance,” which is supposedly the “natural state” of humans).

Blood crystalization (diagnostic blood crystalization): Pseudodiagnostic method involving the introduction of a blood sample to a copper chloride solution. “Crystal signs” of illness in the resultant “blood-crystal picture” allegedly express the guidance of “a higher functional plane coming to



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expression." "Organ-signs," for example, purportedly indicate dysfunction of an organ or a bodily system. Supposedly, each so-called organ-sign reflects a "multilayered organ principle" (which includes "the organ-bound 'soul organ'") and, on "the psychic

plane," is the foundation for related "soul qualities."

Chiki energy flow: "Treatment" reportedly invented by Masato Nakagawa, Ph.D., the founder of *shinkiko* (see below). It allegedly relieves discomfort and pain by improving "energy flow."

The Clean-Me Out Program™: Neo-Christian system of "self-healing" developed principally by Richard Anderson, N.D., N.M.D. Two herbal supplements constitute its foundation: *Chomper*, whose 11 herbs include cascara sagrada (a laxative) and lobelia

(ingestion of which is risky); and *Herbal Nutrition*, whose 10 herbs include alfalfa, comfrey (which is poisonous), horsetail (a weak diuretic), and licorice root. Besides these and other supplements, the program involves enemas and avoiding intake of meat and dairy products. In the fourth (second revised) edition of *Cleanse and Purify Thyself* (1994), Anderson states that "cooked, frozen, canned and processed foods . . . drain the life force from the body." In Chapter 9, he describes "a profound Divine experience" wherein a female "Divine Being" filled him with "information." He states that purification is a "guaranteed entrance" into heaven and that people who are willing to purify themselves "shall have the help of God's mightiest messengers and, if necessary, legions of angelic beings."

Colorpuncture™ (colorpuncture system, Osho esoteric colorpuncture system): Combination of "Energy

Mandel and practiced at the Mandel Institute in Bruchsal, Germany. It reportedly is the "science of bio-energy," whose "levels" range from the material to the esoteric. One of the premises of esogetics is that colored light transmitted by acupuncture meridians tends to heal specific forms of disease and dysfunction.

Flower essence therapy: Enlargement of Bach flower therapy (see above) pioneered in the 1970s by Richard Katz, who founded in 1979 the Flower Essence Society (FES). The system involves purported intake of "flower essences"—"subtle liquid extracts" whose alleged active ingredients are "life forces" from wildflowers or "pristine" garden blossoms.

Harner Method Shamanic Counseling (HMSC): Admixture of classic shamanism and the work of author Michael Harner, Ph.D., founder and director of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. The purported

and Events attracted to you because they are opposed to your Soul Pattern"; "Soul Pattern" as "the pattern inherent in your Soul. . . the point-of-view from which you are able to see and express life when you are free from your "Stress Pattern"; and "Soul" as "the immortal, spiritual, moral or emotional nature of a human being."

Ho'oponopono: Reputed ancient Hawaiian process whose alleged main purpose is discovery of the "Divinity" within oneself. Apparently, this supposedly enables removal of "the internal cause" of stress. The method purportedly: "releases" problems and "blocks" that cause "imbalance," stress, and "disease" in "the self"; brings peace and "balance" through a physical, mental, and spiritual "cleansing" that involves repentance and "transmutation"; and creates "balance," freedom, love, peace, and wisdom within individuals (and other social entities) and the "Universe." According to the Foundation of I, Inc., in Mamaroneck, New York, Ho'oponopono "can be used for animate and inanimate objects" and "on any problem or situation."

Johrei: Supposedly purificatory method that defines the Johrei Fellowship, a worldwide interfaith association with a center in Manhattan. Purportedly, sessions take about 20 minutes, do not entail physical contact, and are always free of charge. The term *Johrei* also refers to a *paradisiacal doctrine* and to an alleged something that, through the focusing of "Divine Light," naturally eases physical and mental distress. Japanese businessman Mokichi Okada founded the movement in 1935. Okada allegedly had learned "God's Divine Plan" for the "New Age" through a series of divine revelations. Johrei's principles include the "Law of Purification," which holds that sickness is simply "Nature's" way of restoring health, and the "Law of Spiritual Affinity," which holds that innumerable "spiritual cords" dominate human existence. Another principle is that one's health and material resources are functions of one's "spiritual condition."

Karuna reiki (formerly called Sai Baba reiki): Form of reiki named and taught by "Reiki Master" William Lee

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Emission analysis" (Kirlian photography) and a form of color therapy. German naturopath Peter Mandel, who developed "esogetics" (see below), named the system. "Treatment" involves application of colored light, with a device that resembles a penlight, to "acupuncture receptors" in the skin. According to colorpuncture theory, color is "life energy" that carries "healing information," and acupuncture meridians convey this information to the cells and organs that need it.

Dimensional clearing: "Process" allegedly designed to clear the human "energy field" of "external elements" that are not part of the self, such as "Lost Souls," "Thought Forms," and "fragments" of other people.

Directed esoteric toning: Form of toning (see "BioSonic Repatterning™," above) that posits a "spiritual self," *chakras*, *prana*, *kundalini*, clair-audience, and clairvoyance.

Esogetics: System developed and named by German naturopath Peter

thrust of HMSC is problem-solving by divination. Supposedly, practitioners ("ordinary reality HMSC counselors") serve merely as facilitators, and sacred teachers in "nonordinary reality" are the "real" counselors.

Healing touch: "A way of moving energy around" manually, according to a 1995 edition of "The Other Side." Therein, an alleged beneficiary of the method stated: "It feels like having a complete massage without being touched." The method posits an "energy field."

HealthWatchers System™: "Specialized application" of Biological Immunity Analysis™ (see above) to weight management. Its centerpiece is the HealthWatchers Analysis™, a purported test of urine and saliva for "the physical and emotional frequency" of an individual's "Stress Pattern." HealthWatchers System®, a mail-order house in Scottsdale, Arizona, defines "Stress Pattern" as "the resistance created by People, Places, Circumstances

Rand. Rand is the author of *Reiki, The Healing Touch*; founder of the Center for Reiki Training in Southfield, Michigan; and editor-in-chief of *Reiki News*, a quarterly published by the center. Reiki is a variant of the laying on of hands. *The Reiki Handbook* (1992) describes it as a "healing art" whereby therapists channel *reiki*, "universal life energy power," through their bodies for storage in the solar plexus, and into "dis-eased" individuals for "rebalancing." The Sanskrit word *karuna* is translatable as "compassionate action." The purported focus of *karuna reiki* is development of *karuna*.

Laserpuncture: Technique involving application of a laser beam to acupuncture points.

Mentalphysics: Purported practical, wholistic, futuristic science and "super yoga" founded in 1927 by the Reverend Edwin J. Dingle, an English journalist and publisher who died in 1972. Mentalphysics supposedly brings out the "hidden meaning" of the Bible and reportedly involves "astral travel"; aura reading ("aura study"); chanting; *jin shin jyutsu* (a variant of *shiatsu*); medication (including guided meditation); *pranayama* ("deep scientific breathing exercises"); "pranic therapy" (a variant of channeling); reflexology; *shiatsu*; and individualization of diet according to "chemical type."

Nutripathy: "A religious science of experiencing mental, financial, physical, social and spiritual health using specific universal laws," according to *Nutripathy . . . The Key to Your Prosperity, Success and Spiritual Fulfillment* (1984). Gary A. Martin, D.N., Ph.D., Th.D., D.Sc., originated the system in the late 1970s, allegedly thanks to divine influence. It involves hair analysis ("mineral analysis from hair") and a variation of Bach flower therapy (see above). Its premises include the following: (1) God is in everyone. (2) One's "True Self" is God ("Love"). (3) "Proper nutrition" and realization of one's "true identity" together make for a perfect life.

Pranic psychotherapy: Application of pranic healing to psychological ailments. Pranic healing is a form of "paranormal healing" promoted by Dr. Choa Kok Sui.

It posits chakras, meridians ("bioplasmic channels"), and an "energy body" that consists of an "inner aura," an "outer aura," and a "health aura." Pranic psychotherapy includes four "healing techniques" besides those of pranic healing: (1) an "advanced cleansing technique," purportedly for the removal and disintegration of "traumatic psychic energy" and such; (2) an "advanced form of energizing," purportedly for the disintegration of "negative elementals" ("bad spirits") and the repair of "etheric webs" that lie in a one-to-one relation behind chakras; (3) activation and inhibition of chakras; and (4) creation of a "positive thought entity" for the patient. In *Pranic Psychotherapy* (1993), Sui states: "Flicking your hand has to be done frequently when energizing in order to efficiently eliminate dirty energy."

Rei-so (spiritual diagnosis): Pseudodiagnostic method whose apparent main premise is that dead people, in the form of spirits (interpretable as consciousness, energy, or vibration), can influence living people who had an intimate relationship with them. Supposedly, spirits create darkness in the "auras" of people they are affecting negatively.

Shinkiko: Allegedly "the ultimate healing art from Japan," an "intuitive medical science" founded by Masato Nakagawa, Ph.D. Similar to *Qigong*, *shinkiko* purportedly involves therapeutic application of *Shin-ki* ("healing-energy"). Supposedly, Shinkiko "therapists" can tap a "limitless universal energy source." Proponents recommend the system for many health problems, including AIDS, cancer, cholecystitis, cirrhosis, deafness, glaucoma, hepatitis, and nephritis.

Sonopuncture: Technique involving application of ultrasound to classical acupuncture points.

Spiritual midwifery: Childbearing philosophy promoted by Ina May Gaskin in her book of the same name. It posits "spiritual energy" that is "Holy," indivision of humanity ("We are all One"), *shakti* (divine female "energy"), and God. Moreover, it euphemizes contractions as "energy rushes" and postulates that "a husband and wife form a single energy unit."

Stress pattern processingSM: "Modality" whose centerpiece is the Health Watchers AnalysisTM (see "Health Watchers SystemTM," above). One of its premises is that humans are "electrically driven" spiritual beings.

Subtle aromatherapy: Form of vibrational healing (see "Vibrational medicine," below) promoted by Patricia Davis in her book of the same name. "Aromatherapy" refers to any application of essential oils that is purportedly for beauty or health. Essential oils allegedly can restore "balance" and "harmony" not only to one's body but also to one's life. "Subtle aromatherapy" refers to any use of essential oils with the purported objective of: (1) healing the "physical body" by affecting the "subtle body" ("energetic body"), or (2) contributing to personal and spiritual growth.

Swedish-Esalen: A "light/relaxing" and "nurturing" form of massage. It allegedly reintegrates the body and soul.

Vibrational medicine (vibrational healing, energy medicine, subtle-energy medicine): "Healing philosophy" whose main tenet is that humans are "dynamic energy systems" ("body/mind/spirit" complexes) that reflect evolutionary patterns of soul growth." Its premises include the following: (1) Health and illness originate in "subtle energy systems." (2) These systems coordinate the "life-force" and the "physical body." (3) Emotions, spirituality, and nutritional and environmental factors affect the "subtle energy systems." Vibrational medicine embraces: acupuncture; aromatherapy (see "Subtle aromatherapy," above); Bach flower therapy (see above); "chakra rebalancing"; channeling; color breathing; color therapy (chromotherapy); crystal therapy; distant healing; EAV (Electroacupuncture According to Voll); flower essence therapy (see above); homeopathy; Kirlian photography; laserpuncture (see above); the laying on of hands; mesmerism; moxibustion; orthomolecular medicine; past-life regression; psychic surgery; radonics; the Simonton method; sonopuncture (see above); toning (see "BioSonic RepatterningTM," above); Transcendental Meditation®; and therapeutic touch. □