

Oskar Estebany

Oskar Estebany was a Hungarian-Canadian psychic healer who in laboratory experiments produced significant effects on mice, plants, blood hemoglobin and enzymes. His 'laying on of hands' technique was developed into the practice of Therapeutic Touch.

Background

Oskar Estebany was born in Hungary in the early twentieth century (birth and death dates not known). He served in the army as a cavalry officer, reaching the rank of colonel. A life-changing event occurred when his beloved horse became ill: knowing it would be destroyed if it did not recover, he spent all night in its stall. 'He massaged it, he caressed, he talked to it, he prayed over it,'^[1] and by morning the horse was well. Other soldiers began bringing horses to him to heal, and then also their pets. After some initial hesitation, Estebany eventually carried out a successful healing on a human, a gravely ill child. Subsequent practice with human patients over a period of ten years led to him becoming well-known in Hungary.

After leaving the army, Estebany offered his services for research purposes. Following the 1956 revolution he emigrated to Canada,^[2] where he met the biochemist and medical researcher [Bernard Grad](#), of McGill Medical School in Montreal. In 1957, the pair began a series of experiments, which Grad published in the 1960s.^[3] Estebany went on to participate in experiments conducted by nurse and professor Dolores Krieger together with healer Dora Kunz in northern New York state for some five years, and later participated in experiments by Sister Justa Smith (all described below).

Personality

Krieger describes Estebany as 'a well-built man with cheery blue eyes and a frequent smile' who would work on healing for sixteen hours a day, and was weak in English despite speaking several other languages fluently.^[4]

Kunz describes Estebany as a 'fine and kind man' who 'never hesitated to help anyone who asked. ... Mr. Estebany thought of healing and helping others as the central factor in his life. This was his basic reality, and everything else was at the periphery of his thinking'.^[5]

Healing Method

Krieger writes:

During the healing sessions, Estebany was very quiet ... He would most frequently sit on a small stool either in front of or behind the healee and put his hands wherever he felt they were needed; occasionally Dora [Kunz] would suggest that he put his hands over a particular area that she could perceive in need of being energized. At times, he would make a little joke to put the healee

at ease, but other than that he would remain with his hands on the healee, occasionally shifting position or placing his hands on another area, the entire treatment lasting for about twenty to twenty-five minutes. The healee would ... come back the next day if his or her condition warranted it ...

When pressed, Krieger notes, Estebany would say that he felt that he was a channel for the spirit of Jesus the Christ.^[6] Grad writes:

He believed that our planet was surrounded by a life-supporting energy that ordinarily was taken up by people everywhere. In sickness, however, there was some defect in this uptake and by touching the patient to provoke healing, energy from the surrounding atmosphere moved down his hands to the patient, thereby re-establishing the normal link between the sick person and the energy.^[7]

Experiments

Bernard Grad

[Bernard Grad](#) was the first scientist known to have conducted laboratory experiments with rigorous blinding and other controls to test the ability of a psychic healer.^[8] He worked with Estebany from November 1957 for seven years.

In the first experiment, three groups of one hundred mice each were given a wound on the skin of the back. One group was treated by Estebany (referred to in the paper as 'Mr E'), holding compartmented metal boxes, each containing 8-10 mice, between his hands. A second group was treated by people with no claimed healing ability; the third was not treated at all. A small but significant effect was found.^[9] Further work, reported in 1965, produced similar results.^[10]

In another experiment, goiters were induced artificially in seventy mice divided into one group treated by Estebany, a second group exposed to heat equivalent to that of Estebany's hands, and a third not given healing or heat. The goiters of the two control groups grew significantly faster than those in the Estebany group.^[11] A second goiter experiment showed that goiter growth was slowed if mice were exposed to cloths that Estebany had held in his hands, and the mice were observed to consistently sit on them.^[12]

Grad then turned to plant experimentation, testing the effects of saline solutions which had been treated by Estebany. These were used to water barley seeds that had been 'wounded' by heating in an oven. Significantly better growth was observed, both when Estebany treated the solution in an open vessel^[13] and in a stoppered bottle.^[14]

M Justa Smith

Sister M Justa Smith carried out experiments with Estebany on the pancreatic enzyme trypsin, having learned during her doctoral research that its activity was increased by exposure to a magnetic field. She divided trypsin into four samples: one treated by Estebany by wrapping his hands around the flask; a second exposed

to ultraviolet light at a frequency known to damage it, then treated similarly by Estebany; a third exposed to a magnetic field; and a fourth not treated at all. The sample treated by Estebany reacted much the same as the one exposed to the magnetic field, and there was a similar but less dramatic effect on the UV-damaged sample.^[15] Further experiments with psychic healers and enzymes showed effects that were ‘exactly what one would predict if they were functioning in the body to combat illness.’^[16]

Krieger

Following the Grad and Smith studies, Dolores Krieger tested the effect of laying-on-of-hands on blood hemoglobin. She asked Estebany to heal a group of nineteen patients over six days, and found they subsequently contained significantly-increased hemoglobin values compared to a nine-person control group. Two further studies with more patients and for longer periods of time obtained similar results. Estebany’s own hemoglobin showed no change.^[17]

Legacy

Although Estebany and other healers maintained that healing ability was a gift from God and could not be taught, Dora Kunz and Dolores Krieger decided to attempt it anyway, on the premise that the only requirement was a genuine will to help others. They went on to teach a technique based on their observations of Estebany’s work, named Therapeutic Touch, starting at the clinic in northern New York state in the early 1970s. According to the Therapeutic Touch International Association, there are now more than 100,000 people trained in TT around the world.^[18]

Video

On 27 September 1980, the American paranormal documentary TV show *In Search Of...* aired an episode entitled ‘Faith Healing’, in which healers, scientists and sceptics were interviewed. Oskar Estebany and Bernard Grad both appear and the wounded-mice experiment is shown (some viewers may find the images disturbing). The episode can be seen on YouTube [here](#) (Estebany/Grad portion runs 13:10-16:28.). Its IMDb entry is [here](#).

Grad Collection

A collection of Bernard Grad’s papers and other materials is kept at the University of Manitoba and includes a box of twenty years’ worth of materials concerning Estebany. Its catalogue can be seen [here](#).

KM Wehrstein

Literature

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Endnotes

Footnotes

1. ^ Krieger (199), 4. All information in this paragraph is drawn from this source unless otherwise noted.
2. ^ The Free Dictionary (n.d.)
3. ^ Grad (1970).
4. ^ Krieger (1992), 5.
5. ^ Kunz with Krieger (2004), 6.
6. ^ Krieger (1992), 5-6.
7. ^ Grad (1988), 107.
8. ^ Randall (1975-1976), 400.
9. ^ Grad, Cadoret, & Paul (1961).
10. ^ Grad (1965).
11. ^ Grad (1970), 20.
12. ^ Grad (1970), 20-21.
13. ^ Grad (1963).
14. ^ Grad (1964).
15. ^ Smith (1972).
16. ^ Krippner & Villoldo (1976), 29.
17. ^ Krieger (1975). Individual study papers: Krieger (1972, 1973, 1974).
18. ^ Therapeutic Touch International Association (n.d.). This web page gives the 100,000 figure; that it is now more than 100,000 was confirmed in a personal communication by TTIA operations manager Sue Conlin.