

Section 5

BODY, MIND, AND ELMER

Many of us in the social and biomedical sciences have noted that mainstream Western medicine appears at the brink of a gigantic paradigm shift. Underlying theoretical and conceptual models of health and healing have begun broadening to account for the influence of the human spirit. Many names have been proposed for this new perspective. I have termed it theosomatic medicine. Others have called it vibrational medicine, energy medicine, nonlocal or Era III medicine, spiritual medicine, and body-mind-spirit medicine. Regardless of its name, the common thread is an acknowledgment that not just the physical body, and not just the mind (our cognitions, affects, conations, etc.), but something “beyond” mind—call it spirit, soul, higher consciousness, ego monad, or whatever—is a salient factor in disease prevention, health promotion, illness recovery, and physiological processes.

Elmer Green was instrumental in the articulation of this emerging body-mind-spirit perspective years before Western biomedical scientists dared broach these issues. Moreover, he was a pioneering figure in the previous paradigm shift that decades ago established body-mind research as a scientifically legitimate successor to the body-only model of etiology and the determinants of health that dominated the biomedical worldview for so much of the 20th Century.

Yet while Elmer was inventing biofeedback, establishing the field of psychophysiology, founding professional societies for psychologists and behavioral scientists, running his lab at the Menninger Foundation, and doing all the things that helped to usher the body-mind model into respectability, he was also exploring more “subtle” concepts. From the writing of Patañjali, Alice Bailey, Sri Aurobindo, and J.B. Rhine, and others—and from his own explorations of the higher realms—Elmer was drawing down a mosaic of esoteric wisdom in order to articulate a vision of human physiology that acknowledges the centrality of energy, consciousness, and spirituality. This is

the very stuff of the new body-mind-spirit perspective coming to the fore today. Yes, while Western medicine was still lost in the dark ages of its materialistic, mechanistic, reductionistic presumptions, Elmer was already two paradigms ahead of nearly everybody else. As those of us who know him can attest, this is typical for Elmer.

When I was approached to write these remarks, my charge was to reflect on what Elmer's work has meant to me. At first glance, one would think that there should be little connection between Elmer's pioneering efforts in consciousness and the work of an epidemiologist, like me. If so, then why in my *God, Faith, and Health*, a book about epidemiologic investigations of religion, is an entire chapter devoted to research that Elmer conducted and concepts that he helped to legitimize? The answer is simple: when you shepherd in a new paradigm in science—when your work helps to overthrow one mode of thinking with another—the repercussions are likely to be vast and extend far beyond your own field. When geniuses like Aristotle and Bacon and Newton and Einstein posited their theories, the world changed dramatically: in science, medicine, theology, politics, technology, and the arts. Because of Elmer's efforts, likewise, I believe that the intellectual world of the 21st Century will evolve into something very different than what most of the so-called opinion leaders of science and culture could possibly imagine now.

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ELMER GREEN IN THE WORLD CAPITAL OF SELF-REGULATION

Elmer was again in the jungle; not the shadow jungle of biochemical medicine that he so effectively countered to introduce concepts and methodologies in self-regulation. This time it was the real jungle of India with its myriad Yogic traditions and art forms. He traversed the subcontinent of India in 1974 with a crew consisting of members of his family and a portable psychophysiological laboratory to wire and study the self-regulation achieved by Yogis. This self-regulation of autonomic functions is achieved through intense practice of Yoga for many years.

While in India, he visited this writer at the Indian Institute of Technology in Madras (presently renamed Chennai) around early 1974. My graduate students and myself were working on many Biomedical projects that included areas in Biofeedback and Yoga. There were many discussions between us regarding use of EEG and other biophysical parameters in the study of Yoga and other areas of subtle energy research. Of course, the term subtle energy was coined much later, but the problem of measuring these “energies” was already looming large in the horizon of self-regulation phenomena. After his talk at the International Headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Madras the Elmer group left for the U.S.

In the years after 1984, I visited Elmer at his Topeka laboratory several times. In 1986 while touring the U.S, he invited me to spend a few days with him and exchange ideas on consciousness research with his faculty and students. This was an important meeting for me since during that visit I invited Elmer to give a lead address at the International Conference on Energy Medicine in Madras during March, 1987. He readily agreed and visited India with Alyce. His address at the Conference was a landmark paper in the field of Energy Medicine. We toured parts of South India and visited Puttaparthi where the famed Sai Baba lives. We visited the University there and “coincidentally” met an American professor who is a friend of Elmer and who invited us to visit and give a talk in his class, which Elmer did. After an eventful visit there, we left for Madras and Elmer and Alyce left for the US.

When I finally arrived in the U.S. for a protracted stay in 1989, Elmer asked me to be a Part of the Board of the International Society for the Study of Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine. This led us where we are today; in company of a few thousand people around the world who search for the subtle in the gross, for the intangible in the obvious and the coincidental in the unconnected. Elmer has always amazed me in many ways; he is first and foremost a storyteller *par excellence*. He could enthrall an audience for a entire evening, be it about his adventures in biofeedback, his nursing Alyce through the years or his experience with his Teacher. His extensive experience in many areas including physics and psychophysiology, healing and consciousness and his interaction with scientists and healers in these areas are an inspiration to us all who have been privileged to know and work with him over the years.

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LIFE AFTER MEETING ELMER

I met Elmer in 1977 or 1978 at The Menninger Clinic. My family had been involved with Menninger for decades and my father was introducing me around. Elmer made a presentation to a Trustee group, and I was fascinated. Until then, I had been a normal consumer of traditional medicine: the doctor knew best, and I went to him when ill or hurt and did what he told me to do.

What Elmer talked about was both new and not-new, because I had lived around the world, including in countries that were Buddhist, and it seemed to me that some of what Elmer discussed had links to that. I returned to Menninger and took every course Elmer's group offered. After I became a Trustee I visited with Elmer and Alice and Steve and Pat every chance I got. It was all interesting, this voluntary controls business, but I did little with it myself, for years. Then in the mid-1980s I battled an alcohol problem, a failing business, and a divorce—in short, things were coming apart for me.

I began to practice in earnest, starting with hand and foot warming and eventually to traveling through the body. I was able to get into a deeply relaxed state and talk to my body and my mind. I took many guided imagery trips. First I discovered peace of mind and quiet emotions, and it will surprise no one that I began to heal and to take charge of my life in ways I had never dreamt I could. Each visit with Elmer and company reinforced my desire to learn more and to use that knowledge to reshape much of my thoughts and feelings. Elmer was the only person in his field, I found, who was both “way out there” and solidly grounded in practicality. His scientific background and his fervent wish to merge modern medicine with alternatives was unique. Alyce, as everyone knows, was one of the gentlest souls I ever met, and her investigations into the sources of creativity, for example, shed new light on subjects previously mysterious, even unknowable.

I used the tools Elmer gave me not only on myself, but on addicts and alcoholics I was treating in an outpatient setting. Most dramatically, I used guided imagery taught me by Pat Norris, on addicted Vietnam vets who clearly suffered severe PTSD symptoms. Those trips were at the time shattering to these men, but they believed they had greatly benefited. One remarked, “I

never could face that time when everyone around me was dead and wounded and I was sure I was next. Every time it came into my mind, I drank or used. Now I don't feel that urge.”

Since then I have attended Council Grove sessions and ISSSEEM meetings and have listened to many presenters of other methods; but all of them seem to me to be, at their core, exactly what Elmer taught. Only some of the trappings were different.

Elmer's perspectives and methods and ideas are so far reaching that I believe they will be studied and appreciated for decades to come, as even the most hidebound Western medical practitioners begin to realize there is more to healing than surgery and pills.

Elmer Green is a mentor, a friend, and a prophet. Nothing less. It has been my privilege to know him.

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