The Seven Stages to Health & Transformation™

Ancient Healing Methods

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Patient: “I have an earache.”
Doctor: 2000 BC “Here, eat this root.”
        1000 AD “That root is heathen, say this prayer.”
        1850 AD “That prayer is superstitious, drink this potion.”
        1940 AD “That potion is snake oil, swallow this pill.”
        1985 AD “That pill is ineffective, take this antibiotic.”
        2000 AD “That antibiotic is artificial. Here, eat this root.”
—Author unknown

An integrated approach to healing is not a new idea. It has appeared in various forms since antiquity. In fact, what is now termed traditional or allopathic medicine has only been dominant for about 100 years, but the tendency to be focused only on outer ways of healing has been dominant for at least the last five hundred years. Alternative or complementary medicine is, in fact, the true traditional medicine. “We have been calling genuinely traditional medicine—used for at least 2500 years—‘alternative’ only because today’s newcomer ’traditional’ medicine has misappropriated that attractive word, and truly traditional medicine has not shouted theft.”¹ In order to see how healing has evolved, let’s journey together backwards in time for twenty-five centuries to Ancient Greece.

Traditional medicine, according to the more accurate definition, was well established in Classical Greece from 450 BC to 380 AD. Traditional medicine as practiced in this era, was a truly integrated approach, where equal emphasis was placed on both the inner and outer aspects of healing. Scattered throughout southern Europe were about four hundred temples of Asclepius, the ancient Greek god of healing. In order to heal their physical symptoms, people would have to travel from their town or city to the temples in outlying areas.

The first implication of this arrangement was that they actually had to do something. They had to be intentional about their healing; they had to mobilize themselves and change location. This intentionality is not just about physical location, but also about a change in attitude or psychology as well. Some effort and discipline were needed, and there was inevitably some hardship. Modern research has shown that the further one travels to seek help, the better one’s prognosis, particularly with regard to cancer.² So there was logic and wisdom in the methodology of the ancient Greeks. They required that their patients travel far distances to get the healing they sought. Today, an individual may not take a physical journey for her healing, but rather a psychological one in which she moves from one attitude in the beginning to an entirely new psychological place. There must be a tremendous urge that arises from within the person seeking the healing for her to live as much as she is humanly capable at her maximum potential as a fully embodied and conscious human being. She must be willing to challenge many of her preconceived notions about herself, delve

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¹ Stang 2005, 10.
² Journal of the National Cancer Institute Vol.95, No. 18 (17 September 2003): 1370-75.
deeply into her conscious and unconscious material and be willing to take on the archetype of the seeker who wishes to be healed. This, in my experience, is the real crux of a healing and transforming experience. *Unless there is a fundamental shift in consciousness, true healing and integration of your life is impossible.*

When people came to the temples of Asclepius, they began their healing experience in the outer sanctum, where the concerns of the physical body were addressed. They fasted, studied nutrition, detoxified, and were massaged with anointed oils. In my office, most people expect to be addressed initially at this level of healing. They want to know that, for their particular diagnosis, there are some physical remedies that can be applied. They are, however, fortified and lulled into a false security by the beliefs propagated through mechanistic medicine: if they are suffering from a symptom, there must be only a physical explanation and hence, only a physical treatment. I believe this attitude is fundamental to human nature and typical of our collective understanding of disease and illness at this time. This approach to healing is entirely appropriate, albeit limited, and forms the basis of the methods of healing we bring to bear at Stage Two of the Seven Stages model. The research that links mind, body, and spirit (Stages Two through Seven in the Seven Stage model) to physical healing, although it exists, has not yet achieved respectability among mainstream practitioners. It will probably take another few decades before the research achieves a level of reproducibility that will convince the skeptics to sit up and take notice.

Back to the ancient temple of Asclepius. After they had completed the rituals and practices of outer healing, Greek patients would move into the inner sanctum of the temple, where the priests officiated. In the middle of the temple were stone pillars carved with symbols of twin snakes winding around and down the pillars. The twin snakes or serpents were the symbol of healing in Greek mythology—the balanced serpents of the conscious and the unconscious, the inner and the outer. This was to acknowledge that health is not just an external matter. Patients were also required to take an oath, swearing allegiance to the gods Apollo and Asclepius. They also were asked to give an offering of a honey cake, implying that in order to gain something, they had to let go of something that was no longer working in their lives, to allow for renewal. Elliot Dacher describes this ritual:

“(And) the offering and devotion to the god, which was an outward projection of the healer within, was an acknowledgement of and symbolic surrender to the more profound healing forces buried in our mind and spirit, unseen because they are as yet unknown”

It was expected that the patients, when they went into the inner temple, would stay for a number of days, if not weeks. In fact, it was encouraged that they not leave until they had had some sign, usually in the form of a dream, signifying that healing was either underway or complete. They were asked to reference their inner wisdom, the healer within, an essential requirement in any healing experience, where the limited vision of consciousness as experienced through the five senses is enriched by messages and symbols from the unconscious. These dreams were then interpreted by the priests and permission was then given to continue on the healing journey. In undertaking this part of the experience, they were acknowledging that they were not coming for a quick fix or a physical cure, but were prepared for an encounter with the deeper medicine, the healing force within.

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The twin snakes, the Caduceus, are the symbol of healing used in modern medicine. It has been acknowledged for at least the last few thousand years as a symbol of power inherited from the past, with its origins in the world of myth which, as Robertson Davies has written, “is still a potent, if rarely recognized, force in our daily lives.” What exactly does this symbol signify? Myth tells us this is the staff of Hermes, the Greek version of the Egyptian god Thoth. Thoth is the god with a man’s body and the head of a bird, the ibis. He was worshipped as the creator of the arts and the sciences, of music, astronomy, speech and the written word. The staff is said to represent the power of the gods. Greek legend has it that one day Hermes was walking along and saw two warring snakes fighting with each other. He took his staff and struck it between them to separate them. They curled themselves around the staff, “forever in contention, but held in a mutuality of power by the reconciling staff,” as Davies wrote. And now the symbol of modern medicine is the staff of Hermes, separating two opposing forces, not letting one outshine the other, not letting either win the battle in their struggle for supremacy.

The two opposing forces are Wisdom and Knowledge, and the caduceus is a reminder that medical practitioners must maintain a balance between the two. Knowledge, in this framework, is what one learns from the outside: the doctor brings his many years of arduous training to bear on the diagnosis. Wisdom is what comes from within, where the doctor looks not at the disease but at the bearer of the disease: “It is what creates the link that unites the healer with his patient, and the exercise of which makes him a true physician, a true healer, a true child of Hermes. It is Wisdom that tells the physician how to make the patient a partner in his own cure.”

Both of these sources of wisdom must be accessed by not only health care providers in the application of their healing arts, but also by the patient, in order to maximize the healing transformation. The patient must acquire as much external knowledge as she can, from as many different sources as she needs, while also being cognizant of the fact that not all healing is about external remedies or potions. An inner journey is required.

Alastair Cunningham (2005) has described the broad terrain of this dichotomy by dividing the different routes to healing into two broad categories:

[Spontaneous healing] is what the body does by itself, without any deliberate intervention by the owner of the body, or by others. There are many spontaneous or automatic healing mechanisms operating constantly in the body and mind; for example, healing of wounds, the immune response to foreign micro-organisms, or, at the mental level, the lessening of anxiety or depression with the passage of time. Assisted healing, by contrast, denotes some kind of active intervention, by the person herself, or by others.

He further divides the latter form of healing into two forms. Externally assisted healing is “applied to the sufferer from outside, either by oneself or by others.” This

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4 Robertson Davies, A Merry Heart: Can A Doctor Be A Humanist (New York: Penguin Group, 1996),
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 97.
7 Alistair Cunningham, Can the Mind Heal Cancer? (Canada: Alistair Cunningham, 2005) 3-4
is what occurred in the outer courtyards of the healing temples. In modern times, external assistance can be in the form of “drugs, surgery, [or] healthy behaviors like exercise and good diet.” Internally assisted healing “is caused by changes initiated within the person...by changes in thoughts and emotional reactions...to try to affect the health of the body or the mind.” This process is what is broadly referred to as mind–body or self-healing, and occurs only after deep introspection and a shift in attitude about one’s beliefs, values and preconceptions.

Further to these two ways of healing is that which is transcendent to both. Deepak Chopra, in an address to the Institute for Noetic Studies (IONS) conference, Washington, 2005, spoke about the fact that there are three essential ways of perceiving reality:

1) **Through the eyes of the flesh** — This requires our sensory perception. Science utilizes sophisticated technology, referred to as the “prostheses of our senses,” to extract information from the physical world. He gives the example that if we want to see if there are craters on the moon we use these “eyes of the flesh” to collect the relevant data. In mechanistic, externally-assisted healing, we are highly dependent on knowledge at this level.

2) **Through the eyes of the mind** — In this manner, information arrives, through our senses, and then is interpreted against the backdrop of our own personal knowledge base, ideas, thoughts, perceptions, values, beliefs, etc. It is this internal dialogue, the nature of which, being of a mental construct, that often has to be “re written”: so to speak, so that new information can replace the old. This occurs in the mind, not in the physical world.

3) **Through the eyes of the soul** — Chopra quotes William Blake:

   *We are led to Believe a Lie*
   *When we see not Thro’ the Eye*
   *Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night*
   *When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light*

Blake describes here the concept of true reality lying beyond the illusion of our senses.

Thus if we wish to know this deeper aspect of ourselves, this timeless, eternal, non physical self, we cannot use the eyes of the flesh or the eyes of the mind. One has to traverse the territory of the inner landscape, the world of transcendent consciousness that is beyond the experience of everyday waking reality. This landscape is beyond both mind and body. This experience has been highly sanctified and respected as an essential component of any one person’s healing journey. Upon seeing reality through the “eyes of the soul”, ones sense of self is no longer entirely fixated on physical or psychological reality. It is as if you see with another eye, another perspective, often called the witnessing self, where the concerns of the body and that of the psychological self, fade into the far distance, and what is left is this sense of presence, this sense of a timeless and eternal Self. All concerns about physical reality, health and illness, disappear into the expanded realization that we are not our physical bodies. We “wake up” to our true, extraordinary reality and transcend day to day concerns of ordinary, pedestrian life. In this sense we are “eternally healthy” and have no concerns with the fears and limitations of a limited physical lifespan. There is a deep, abiding, unshakeable
inner silence and knowing. It is as if our souls have woken up to their existence and to their relevance.

In the East, with its profound dedication to the inner process of healing, there has long been a tradition of orientating oneself towards this experience through various yoga traditions: Bhakti yoga is the path of love and devotion; jnana yoga is the path of intellectual rigor and discipline; hatha yoga is the path of physical mastery of the body and the senses; and karma yoga is the path of selfless service. By dedicated and rigorous adherence to these spiritual practices, the possibility of transcendence to only sensory and mental ways of seeing the world is possible. The path to transcendent consciousness is arrived at via the third way of perceiving reality that Chopra describes. The West has not had the same exposure to these well-defined disciplines.

This awareness of transcendent consciousness is a relatively recent development with the emergence on the planet of the great sages Buddha, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Socrates and the sages of the Upanishads. Previous to their appearance on the world stage, human experience was limited to everyday reality as dictated by the senses and the mind, motivated largely by a desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain. The master control of these behaviors was the autonomic nervous system and its twin controls of pleasure seeking and/or the fight/flight response. Seeking pleasure, avoiding pain, feeding, procreation of the species and fending off approaching danger were very much the only operational systems of day-to-day existence. Once these sages spread their teachings, human beings were able to transcend mundane states of living and taste reality for the first time—not reality as is witnessed through the five senses, but transcendent reality, the state of pure awareness so well described in metaphysical texts. This process is an inner one, one that requires deep enquiry into the core nature of one’s reality.

Modern allopathic medicine has skewed itself more heavily in the direction of the Caduceus’ Knowledge, which has resulted in some of the most successful medical advances of modern times, but has neglected Wisdom, and the necessity for this inner exploration of an individual’s landscape of consciousness, which holds the promise of this deeper healing, beyond merely treating symptoms or diseases of the physical body.

Let’s again return to the temple of Asclepius. Once the patients had been in the temples and had their inner transformative experiences interpreted by the priests, they were then escorted outside of the temple to large amphitheaters where traditional plays, such as the Oedipal Trilogy, the trilogy of Orestia, the journeys of Odysseus, and the great dramas of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides were enacted. The largest theatre in ancient Greece was at the healing temple at Epidaurus, and with its perfect acoustics, it is still in use today. The purpose behind exposing patients to these dramas was to illustrate to the patients that what they considered to be very personal, dramatic experiences had their origins in antiquity. Behind an individual’s personal experiences lay the archetypal dramas of health, illness, love and hate, living and dying that have been playing out for centuries. This exposure was meant to reinforce that whatever problems the patient had, others had those problems, too. By reflecting on the themes that were enacted in these plays, those of lust and betrayal, revenge and shame, suffering and salvation, the individual could engage in deep inner therapy where the meaning and lessons of their own lives could be compared to those enacted on stage.
Wisdom could be imparted and the experience gained could be contemplated, against the backdrop of the patient's own lives.

Furthermore, many of us have been through great traumas in our lives, from romantic betrayals to divorce and bankruptcy, death of loved ones, and stories of loss and gain. This realization would lead them to lighten up somewhat, to take themselves a little less seriously, knowing that we are mythical beings living out mythical lives. In Ancient Greece, as in our world, one of the greatest dangers to living at one's maximum potential, is making the mistake of taking oneself too seriously!

Many of us have taken heroic journeys—spending the first half of life conquering and creating a safe haven for our emerging egos, only to find in the second half of life that nothing of the senses truly satisfies our soul. Nothing outside of ourselves really satisfies our deep existential longing for a fulfilled, related and meaningful life. Once we wake up to this awareness, we then shift our awareness from an outer-directed life governed by trying to satisfy outer authorities (our parents, our peers, or societal expectations), to an inner-directed psychological or spiritually-based life where the questions we ask are more about the meanings behind apparent reality. We access our inner voice, rather than relying on the “outer voice” and opinions of others. Some of us have struggled with these life transitions and thought we were quite unique in these experiences, but throughout antiquity, these stories and dramas have repeatedly unfolded. We are all participating in this greater story of life. Every one of us is living stories out of the Bible or the Bhagavad-Gita or Greek mythology or Roman mythology, and when we, like the Greeks in the amphitheater, see that we’re just re-enacting the perennial human dramas, we lose some of our anxiety over it. We can begin to let go of the sense of existential anxiety that tells us we’re not getting it right.

Furthermore, within the Asclepian temples, in the surrounding gardens and walkways, there were statues completed by some of the great sculptors of the day such as Phidias and Praxiteles. There were also scholars involved in ongoing philosophical debates, “engaging the mind in self-reflective exploration of the meaning and nature of life. Beauty, truth and virtue were all aspects of the good life and a more profound well-being.”

In summary, Greek healing methods suggested that there is an interweaving of both the inner and outer experiences through the evolution and shift of consciousness. Outer remedies were required, but inner ones were just as significant. For every movement on the outside, there had to be the possibility for a movement on the inside as well. The Asclepian temples provided a multitude of experiences across the spectrum of the patient's physical mental and emotional lives and these “multiplicity of experiences together formed a healing ecology of body, mind and spirit” They were the first and most enduring example of a truly integrated medical approach.

It is important to realize from the Asclepian times onwards, this movement between the outer (physical) healing and the inner healing, from the Scientists to the Vitalists, from

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9 Ibid., 28.
the rational to the mystical, has been perpetuated throughout history. At certain periods, the outer traditions have held sway, such as what we now experience in Western medicine, and at other times, more inner directed practices have been dominant. According to Elliot Dacher, there have been two major periods where the outer and inner ways of healing have been equally balanced, the first being the times of ancient Greece and the second in renaissance Europe.

“These were what we call crossover periods, times in which the previously dominant way of viewing the world was in decline and its opposite was on the rise. And for a brief shining moment, inner and outer ways of knowing and healing were in the proper balance and harmony. When this occurs, there is a corresponding flourishing of the arts, science, healing, and of human life itself.”

It is apparent, with the recent interest in all forms of healing, that we are once again in a major crossover period in our history. We have developed extraordinary competence in technological advances and outer ways of healing, but have largely ignored the compensatory opposite, the significance and mastery of the inner life. As with all things that we tend to focus on exclusively, the equal and opposite component will eventually force a balance towards a central integration. This illustrates the obvious yin and yang of day to day dualistically experienced life. It is exciting to witness this present integration, when we have so many opportunities to implement the lessons from this incredible synthesis of ideas.

Originally, the Cnidian School of healing in Ancient Greece viewed the body very much as we view it today: as a mechanistic entity that, when it breaks down, needed fixing. Hippocrates, 460–370 BC, did not agree with this approach. He was more interested in the individual as a unified whole, and all the variables and causative factors that contributed towards a state of sickness or disease, especially the inner attitude of the patient. He viewed symptoms as the body’s attempt to heal itself, and he used remedies and potions taken from nature that assisted the body by exacerbating the symptoms in order to facilitate the body’s own restorative mechanisms.

Hippocrates was also very cognizant of the power of dreams in revealing diagnostic and therapeutic insights. “He theorized that during the day the sense organs are dominant and the soul is passive; but during sleep the emphasis shifts, and the soul then produces impressions instead of receiving them.” So we see that even way back in antiquity, there was interplay between the mechanistic traditions and the more holistic traditions, between the outer and inner methods.

A few centuries later, a famous Roman healer by the name of Galen (ca.130-ca 200 ce) saw the body in a more mechanistic light, made of parts that needed to be separated from the whole in order to assist in healing. Unlike Hippocrates, who saw symptoms as an attempt of the body to heal itself, Galen was the first to consider the body’s symptoms as the

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10 Ibid., 25.
12 This is the same approach made famous hundreds of years later by Hahnemann in Organon of Medicine—his introduction of Homeopathic principles. These principles are further elucidated in the description of homotoxicology in Chapter 4.
actual problem that needed specific treatment. He initiated the separation between seeing symptoms as the problem versus seeing them as a necessary defense of the body to initiate its own spontaneous healing. Galen did have some redeeming features in that he was quite respectful of the capacity of dreams to impart important information to the patient, and to the physician—to the point of carrying out surgical operations based on them (Dossey, 1999, pg. 4). But from our perspective, Galen represents a step away from the holistic approach, to a more mechanistic, physically based “scientific” orientation.

After Galen, the trend swung back towards the more vitalistic orientation and the Christian healing traditions emerged. During this time, there were no remedies as such; there was just faith and the inspiration and presence of the Christ-like healer himself. Here the emphasis was not so much on physical remedies but on the power of God or Christ, inspired by faith, to initiate the healing required. A few kernels of physical medicine remained, but these were replaced by the common belief that illness was due to punishment from God for sins or transgressions of God’s will and that any attempt to treat them with physical remedies, was a transgression of God’s will. Paul Strathern writes, “Other illnesses were thought to result from possession by devils, or were caused by witchcraft, or arose as a result of spells cast by pixies and elves. The only way to cure such afflictions was prayer, penitence or calling upon the assistance of an appropriate saint.” For example, St. Anthony was the saint prayed to if afflicted with ergotism, a fungus-infected rye. If ingested, it led to tremendous burning of the intestines which led the inflicted to dance with agony. This was interpreted by onlookers as being possessed by demons. If one had rheumatic fever with spasmodic movements called chorea, you prayed to St. Vitus for relief. I remember as a medical student seeing young kids in the hospital wards in Cape Town, affected with this consequence of rheumatic heart disease, a terrible affliction that responds quite well to large doses of penicillin. If one compares the approaches to epilepsy as practiced by the Greeks, one realizes how far medicine had turned away from a more comprehensive approach and descended into superstition and ignorance, a millennium later.

Paracelsus (1493–1541) was an extraordinary, controversial figure who primarily followed a more holistic, integral approach to healing. He was the first healer we know of who possessed an understanding of both the vitalistic and the mechanistic aspects of healing, and is considered by many, including the Prince of Wales, to be the father of modern medicine. He experimented with different dosing of substances, ushering in the modern science of chemistry. He retained and developed further some of the ideas initiated by Hippocrates, including that of treating with similars—the idea that the substance which initiated a disease, in the correct dose, will assist in the cure. “Never a hot illness has been cured by something cold, nor a cold one by something hot. But it has happened that like has cured like.” While contributing quite significantly to the idea that certain diseases needed specific treatments of their own, he also understood that many diseases were the result of chemical imbalances in the body. While impressively advancing the cause of scientific medicine, he retained deep mystical leanings and was intrigued by the work by the alchemists of his day, whose mystical interests were to turn the base issues of humanity into a golden spiritual purity. Paracelsus had a deep respect for the innate healing force of Nature, and like

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14 These principles are further elucidated in the description of homotoxicology in Chapter 4.
15 Paul Strathern, Medicine (London: Robertson, 2005), 43.
16 Stang, 2005, pg. 14
Hippocrates, believed that this inner healer was superior to any remedies applied from the outside.

Until the 1500s, we had inner and outer healing traditions entwined with each other. For some of the time, one of the traditions would hold sway, only to be overtaken as the other gained momentum. Descartes, who lived during the first half of the seventeenth century, was the first to separate the internal process—the moods, the emotion, the mind—from the body in a process today called *Cartesian dualism*. “According to Descartes, the body is one sort of substance and the mind another because each can be conceived in term of totally distinct attributes. The body (matter) is characterized by spatial extension and motion, while the mind is characterized by thought.\(^\text{17}\)

Newton, who flourished in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, took dualism and materialism even further. He demonstrated that the universe, according to his calculations, was entirely mechanistic, following strict, precise laws. The implication was made that if the world and the universe existed independently and outside of human experience, then the body must behave in much the same way. Thus, if the body is a machine, interventions must be external and aimed at fixing what is broken. In their haste to replicate the precision in logic being demonstrated by physicists, doctors began to dissect the body into smaller and smaller parts in order to understand the whole.

The first dissection of the human body in 1543 was the beginning of our understanding of anatomy and the mystery of the complexity of the physical body, and the beginning of the dominance of modern or *outer* medicine. From this time forward emerged a tremendous amount of knowledge that gave rise to modern medicine as we know it today. *Era 1 Medicine* in the 1850s, says Dossey, is when medicine first began to become a science.\(^\text{18}\) We’ve had now had four hundred years of this model, with absolutely amazing achievements. We’ve developed an extraordinary wealth of external knowledge, but now have an under-developed understanding of internal or more subjective methods of healing; we are lacking in integral vision when it comes to healing.

Dossey has collected quotations from individuals who view reality from this fixed, external, mechanistic point of view:

*What is the brain but a big slab of meat?*

—Marvin Minsky, MIT

*When I die, I shall rot and nothing of my consciousness will remain.*

—Bertrand Russell

*Consciousness; our thoughts are nothing other than the byproduct of neuropeptides; they have no real relevance.*

\(^{17}\) Frith & Ress, 2007, pg. 9 *This point of view is not currently held by most neuroscientists, who mostly believe that consciousness is the byproduct of activity of the brain, and this aspect of dualism is no longer considered tenable. Modern-day neuroscientists take a materialistic view of the mind—an idea that was first proposed by Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1709 –1751) in *L’h@eme Machine* (1865)—and they continue to search for the neural correlates of consciousness.*

The implication of such statements is that our inner subjective experiences are irrelevant; there is nothing more going on than neurotransmitters, generated by the brain, speaking to each other. And so our inner experiences are completely disregarded as a real and crucial element of our healing, and we are completely divorced from the influences of our cultural traditions and the systems in which they are embedded. I believe this to be an entirely untenable approach to healing and one that has built into its existence its own demise. Fortunately, there are new approaches to consciousness studies as written by Daniel Siegel and Alva Noe, who illustrate how the mind is quite distinct from the brain and how the brain is shaped by the mind, the body and the environment constantly interacting with each other in meaningful coexistence. The brain, in this case, is seen as an appendage added to the mind to increase its computing power19.

There you have the past, from the temples of Asclepius through ancient Rome, onto the Enlightenment, and down to our present day. Science today predominantly focuses on external factors, as we have seen. As we enter a healing journey, we will see how the external and the internal are entwined, equal in importance, and unable to be separated, like the two snakes on the Caduceus staff.

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