

# “What’s the Difference Between Reiki and the Biblical Practice of Laying On of Hands?”

I’m researching [Reiki](#) and found a website that purports to be “Christian Reiki.” The woman who does this says she only connects with the Holy Spirit inside of her for the energy she uses. She commits each session to God and communicates with the Holy Spirit by means of prayer during the session. She further states that the Reiki symbols she uses to deliver that energy actually have no meaning but that they act as focus points for transmission of energy. I would tend to be a little leery about this but want to know, how does this differ from the Christian “laying on of hands”?

Yes; I think this does differ from the Christian “laying on of hands” (1 Tim. 5:22).

Christians lay hands on a brother or sister in Christ as an act of identification. They identify with another believer who is part of the body of Christ. When we then pray for that individual’s healing, there is no attempt to channel “energy” of some sort to bring the person healing. Rather, we simply make a request that God would heal the person if it is His will to do so. Sometimes He is willing; sometimes not. But this is a choice for God; we are simply making a request, subject to His will.

There just isn’t any biblical warrant for “Christian” Reiki, so far as I can see. We are never commanded (or even encouraged) to channel spiritual “energy” for the healing of others. Indeed, I think the biblical authors would regard such a practice as highly suspect. We are simply encouraged to pray

for their healing. And this is something we can do (and that the church has always done) without any assistance from the practice of Reiki.

In this respect I don't see what "Christian Reiki" adds to the equation (that isn't accomplished simply through prayer to God). If the Reiki practitioner thinks that Reiki gives them power or authority over the Holy Spirit, then such a belief is totally absurd and unbiblical. God is sovereign and is not in any way subject to the will and manipulation of men. So it seems to me that Reiki is a questionable practice for Christians, that adds nothing to simple prayer, and that is possibly grounded in some very unbiblical beliefs about God and healing, etc.

At any rate, that's my view of the matter.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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# Watching Transformation Happen

*July 21, 2009*

Last week I was privileged to attend the annual [Exodus Conference](#) along with a thousand people coming out of homosexuality, as well as some family members and people like myself who minister to them. Nothing has built my faith in the power and the loving heart of our life-changing God like my decade-long involvement in this kind of ministry.

I got to experience the power of answered prayer as I stood in worship with a divorced couple whom I have known online for several years but met at the conference. The husband had gone AWOL for the past year, choosing to pursue his feelings instead of his identity as a beloved child of His Father. He told me "something" kept drawing him back into the light: with a smile, I told him that Jesus has His hook in his heart because he belongs to Jesus! And there he was, reconnecting with his God and his wife in worship and the beauty of repentance.

I got to hear the testimony of a beloved young woman, deeply wounded, whom I have watched soften and become so much like her Jesus over the past several years. As we were singing the words "Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow," she suddenly and violently experienced the memory of being a sexually abused five-year-old, sitting in the tub with blood everywhere. In the pain of that moment, Father met her there with the same words He had spoken to [Sy Rogers](#), that evening's speaker, about his sexual abuse: "Daddy sees, and Daddy's sorry." As His compassionate love washed over her, healing came.

And I got to see actual physical transformation in a dear lady with whom I have been walking out her repentance from lesbianism. As she has dared to believe that God really means everything in His word, especially about His love for her and how He sees her as a precious, beautiful, beloved daughter, change has come. She has gone to great lengths to drink in her Abba's love in intimate ways (and has taught me what that can look like in the process). Halfway through the week, she caught a glimpse of herself in a plate glass window and was amazed to realize that her posture had changed: she was walking more upright and confidently, assured that she was "a real person" (her words). At the end of the week, she said she believed the change in her was permanent and lasting. She finally feels solid, not hollow. That's the power of God's

healing love.

And that's why it is such a joyful privilege for me to serve people whose thorn in the flesh is unwanted same-sex attractions. As their SSA drives them to Jesus, transformation happens.

And it is beautiful.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/watching\\_transformation\\_happen](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/watching_transformation_happen)

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## **“Can't God Use Reiki to Heal?”**

Hi Michael,

I am a Christian and I love Jesus with all my heart and believe in His healing power provided for us at the cross. I believe the provision is there, in the spiritual realm and it is up to us to connect with it and receive healing through prayer and taking authority in Jesus' name. I believe He works through us and doesn't refuse any prayer for healing, but does need us to connect with the healing and bring it into the physical realm.

Many Christians go to the doctors, take medication, have operations and none of these practices are frowned upon as “not being dependent on God for healing,” but many do not glorify Jesus in their healing, they usually give the glory to the doctor or hospital who treated them.

I pray for healing and the power to receive and have had healing on many occasions and if I haven't immediately received, I do not for one minute think God hasn't healed me, I know it's my connection or the connection of whoever is praying for my healing that is not quite right.

Yesterday I went for a massage. The therapist asked me about any problem areas. I told her I had had problems with my back on and off for many years, but believed God had healed me. She began the massage, then she suddenly said, "I found the problem spot,"—which she had, she was right on it—"My hand has gone really hot, I'm doing reiki on it." She didn't ask me, she just did it. I didn't mind, didn't know much about it. The next morning I woke up and for the first time in years got out of bed without any pain or stiffness and my back has been great all day, despite lifting and carrying as is the nature of my job. I know it has been healed and I thanked God for the healing and texted the lady to tell her my back was healed. I don't for one minute think she healed me, no more than Benny Hinn heals anyone, he is just a channel like the massage lady was. I gave the glory to God and always will.

I wanted to know more about reiki; that's why I looked on the internet for information and read your article with interest. I must say I am confused and must look into this further, I only want to do the right thing and I will of course speak with my pastor and other Christians, but my main point is that it seems instead of using man-made drugs and procedures for healing, we used natural energy that I believe was created by God for our use.

I'm glad to hear that your back is feeling better! At the same time, I must honestly say that some of the views expressed in your letter strike me as biblically and theologically unsound. Allow me to explain.

I think your first paragraph is a fairly good example. I personally don't believe that what you're describing here is

actually biblical Christianity. After all, where does the Bible teach that God needs us “to connect with the healing and bring it into the physical realm”? What does this even mean? I’ve read such things in books by Wiccans (I’m being totally serious here), but I don’t believe that this is a Christian notion. After all, is God not sovereign and omnipotent? Can He not heal anyone He wants—and at any time He wants?

And if God does not refuse a request for healing, then what do you say to all the truly godly Christian people who (along with their churches and families) have urgently pleaded with God for healing—and not received it? Please think very carefully about this, because you could unintentionally end up causing a great deal of spiritual and emotional pain by insisting that such people do not have enough faith to be healed. Let me offer a bit of biblical support for this contention.

Many evangelical biblical scholars believe that Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was some kind of physical malady. But the Lord refused to heal him of it (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Now did Paul really not have enough faith to be healed? Was it not actually God’s will that he NOT be healed? Similarly, in Galatians 4:13-14 he mentions preaching the gospel to the Galatians while he was ill, an illness which was a trial to them. But if Paul could have been instantly healed, then why did he put the Galatians (and himself) through such an unnecessary trial? Finally, Elisha was a very great prophet of the Lord. And yet, in 2 Kings 13:14 we read that he was suffering from the illness from which he died (2 Kings 13:20). But such a state of affairs seems totally unnecessary (indeed, virtually impossible for a great prophet like Elisha) on the view which you have presented. It thus seems to me that we need to adopt a more nuanced, biblical view of prayer. To see what I mean, please carefully read my article on petitionary prayer here: [www.probe.org/problems-and-promises-of-petitionary-prayer/](http://www.probe.org/problems-and-promises-of-petitionary-prayer/).

In addition, please carefully re-read the last section of my

article on Reiki entitled, “Does All Healing Come from God?” at [www.probe.org/reiki/](http://www.probe.org/reiki/).

Of course, I certainly agree that modern Western medicine is not perfect. But its reliance on quality control, reproducible results, the scientific method, extensive training, education, and licensing, etc., clearly distinguish it from much of energy medicine. In addition, since those who practice it are not typically calling upon spirit guides and other questionable entities, it is much less likely to entangle those making use of it with possible demonic involvement.

At any rate, I’m sincerely glad that you’re feeling better—and I hope that that continues to be the case. But I would caution you against getting any more deeply involved in Reiki energy medicine.

This is maybe not what you were hoping to hear, but I must give you my honest opinion before the Lord.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“I Need Help Resolving Past Stuff In My Life”**

**I need help resolving past stuff in my life. I’m stuck and I don’t know where to go or what to. Can you help?**

I can tell you that from my study over the years, as well as personal experience, I believe the key to emotional healing

(which is what resolving past stuff is about) is a two-pronged effort: grieving and forgiving. That said, the overarching, "big picture goal" is what David realized in Psalm 51:6 when He told the Lord, "I know that You desire truth in my inmost parts." God brings freedom and healing when we allow Him to show us the lies we have believed about what we've experienced and the conclusions we have come to about Him, about life, about other people and about ourselves. When we renounce the lies and embrace the truth, we actually experience Jesus' promise in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." But it needs to be more than an intellectual assent to the truth; we also need to open our hearts to the freeing power of truth.

It's important to face our losses and our woundings, inviting Jesus into the process (absolutely essential), so that we give Him access to those places in our hearts that need healing. In fact, one of my mentors calls Christian denial "the refusal to give God access to the hurts He wants to heal for His glory and our benefit." Instead of going digging, it's much better to ask the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Counselor, to shine His light on which wounds and losses He wants to address, since He knows the best order for untangling our messes. As He brings memories to the surface, we ask for grace in facing them, experiencing the feelings again but this time in a redemptive way because we are giving them to God to heal, and grieving the ungrieved feelings we haven't yet dealt with. This means tears, and sometimes screams. (The best definition I've ever heard of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the emotional debilitation that can follow an emotional trauma such as sexual abuse, or war, or observing something horrific like the workers who cleaned up the aftermath of 9/11, is "failure to scream.") Journaling is one of the most important tools in grieving because there is something therapeutic about the layers of sensory experience in writing on paper: holding the pen, feeling the paper, smelling the ink and the paper, hearing the sounds of pen on paper. And somehow, the Holy



Spirit seems to be able to direct our thoughts and our feelings in the process of writing out what's in our hearts, and He dislodges the shards and splinters of lies that are embedded in our souls so that we can recognize them, renounce them, and embrace the truth He shows us.

One of the things God has shown me about grieving is that there is a finite amount of grief for each wound and loss. He knows how many tears are attached to each wound, and once they're out of us, they are gone forever, collected by God Himself in His tear-bottle (Ps. 56:8). (Consider this: if you think about a childhood loss or painful experience that caused tears, have you cried about it lately? Probably not, because you finished grieving it years ago. There were a finite number of tears over losing a beloved pet in fourth grade, for example. And also consider that since there will be no sorrow or crying or pain in heaven for the believer (Rev. 21:4), all our grieving has a time limit.

The other part of healing is forgiving, where we face the wrongs done to us and choose to let go of them into God's hands for Him to deal with. There are good resources on understanding forgiveness and how to forgive (two of the best are *Total Forgiveness* by R.T Kendall and *I Should Forgive, But...* by Chuck Lynch), but bottom line, we forgive because the only one we hurt by refusing to forgive is ourselves. It's like someone tosses us a hot potato, and we clutch it to our chest exclaiming with pain, all the while continuing to hold it to ourselves. Forgiving means letting go of the hot potato so it no longer hurts us. When we forgive the people who caused us pain, we release them into God's hands for HIM to deal with them as He sees fit. Louis Smedes said that when we forgive someone, we set a prisoner free, and we discover that the prisoner was us.

Refusing to forgive has terrible repercussions. Unforgiveness is a bitter, corrosive poison that consumes a person's soul and diminishes their spirit. I watched a family member grow

increasingly invalid and weak with the years of holding onto grudges and insults, whether real or perceived, as if they were treasures. By the time she died, all of her life and vitality was drained out, and there was nothing but a brittle shell of who she used to be. But failing to grieve also has painful consequences: uncried tears heighten stress and cause all kinds of physical diseases and maladies. Because we are a unit of body, soul and spirit, our bodies hold onto soulish pain and it comes out as physical pain and illness. This is why James 5 “connects the dots” between physical illness, confession of sins, and the need for prayer.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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## **“Is Reiki Occultic?”**

I recently pulled up your website when a friend of mine told me she has a counseling center that practices Reiki. Wondering what Reiki was, I began to search it out. Despite all the Christian voices that support it, I refuse to buy into it, and I feel it is the Holy Spirit working in me. I emailed my friend and told her of my concerns. One of her responses was, “In my mind healing is ultimately the result of God’s love, whether it is a doctor doing a heart transplant or a Reiki master transmitting love through themselves.” She feels it is “God’s action occurring in and through people.”

Is it the work of God to transport some energy through our hands to someone else? Doesn’t sound right. What it all sounds like to me is an occult type practice that people have tried

**to squeeze into a Christian box and it's not quite fitting!**

Thanks for your letter. I'm assuming you've already read my article on Reiki, but if not, here is a link to it: [www.probe.org/reiki/](http://www.probe.org/reiki/).

I begin the article by briefly considering what Reiki is. I then look at whether or not there is scientific support for Reiki. I consider the success claims of Reiki, ask whether Christians should be concerned about it, and also whether all healing comes from God. If you haven't yet read the article, I would encourage you to do so.

Like you, I think there are reasons for Christians to be concerned about Reiki. For one thing, as it's often represented, it has a very different understanding of "God" than biblical Christianity. Thus, when it claims that healing comes from "God," it is asserting something different from what a Christian would mean when he/she claims to have been healed by God. Second, the emphasis on spirit guides should cause us concern. The Bible never tells us to seek a spirit guide, but often warns us of deceptive and demonic spirits. Third, the Bible doesn't talk about a universal life force energy which we can learn to manipulate for health and healing. This sort of language is very foreign to a biblical worldview and is only at home (really) in an Eastern worldview, or one influenced by Eastern thought.

For these reasons and others (spelled out in my article), I think it's a mistake to get involved with Reiki. My perspective would really be the same as yours. Reiki sounds like "an occult type practice that people have tried to squeeze into a Christian box and it's not quite fitting."

I would gently challenge your friend to consider the many ways in which Reiki beliefs and practices seem so foreign (and even contrary) to the teachings of the Bible. For a bible-believing Christian, Reiki seems like a difficult practice to justify.

I hope this helps a bit. Please see my article for a bit more information.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“You Can’t Say Edgar Cayce was a Failure as a Prophet!”**

Your comment about Edgar Cayce being an “abysmal failure” as a prophet is a completely subjective view of his work. There are those who believe that the things of which Mr. Cayce spoke are true. Also, because you can not have a truth without it being believed and it having both epistemic certainty as well as facts to back it up, you can not say as a “truth” that he was a failure as a prophet. Even Nostrodamus was off in many of his predictions, yet he was accurate in what he said.

Thanks for your e-mail. Lou Whitworth, the author of the article you read about Edgar Cayce, is no longer with Probe. Please allow me to reply in his stead.

You begin by stating:

*Your comment about Edgar Cayce being an “abysmal failure” as a prophet is a completely subjective view of his work. There are those who believe that the things of which Mr. Cayce*

*spoke are true."*

Although I would probably not have chosen to use the adjective "abysmal", the claim that Cayce was a failure as a prophet is actually not subjective. It is based on the objective authority of God's Word in the Bible. The Bible actually sets up an objective standard for determining whether someone is, or is not, a true prophet. This standard is nothing less than 100% prophetic accuracy. In Deuteronomy 18:20-22 we read the following:

"But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And you may say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."

In light of this passage, the Christian reasons as follows:

1. Edgar Cayce uttered certain prophecies, or healing remedies, that were not accurate.
2. God's word says that a true prophet is always accurate in what he predicts.
3. Therefore, Edgar Cayce was not a true prophet of God. Biblically speaking, he was a false prophet.

This, of course, is not to deny that Edgar Cayce may have uttered some prophecies and healing remedies which were accurate. But since he also uttered some false prophecies, God's word indicates that he was not a true prophet. The same

reasoning would also apply to the prophecies of Nostradamus. As you yourself pointed out, "Nostradamus was off in many of his predictions".

There is another passage of Scripture which seems particularly relevant to Edgar Cayce. Remember, even Cayce at times wondered about the true source of his special powers. In Deuteronomy 13:1-4 we read the following:

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him."

This passage is especially interesting in light of Cayce's own comments concerning his powers:

"The power was given to me without explanation...it was just an odd trait that was useful in medicine...That's what I always thought, and against this I put the idea that the Devil might be tempting me to do his work by operating through me when I was conceited enough to think God had given me special power" (Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping (False) Prophet).

Since Cayce was quite familiar with the Bible, he had every reason to be suspicious of the source of his power, especially since he made predictions which did not come true.

But please let me also briefly address your description of truth. You write:

*"...because you can not have a truth without it being believed and it having both epistemic certainty as well as facts to*

*back it up, you can not say, as a "truth" that he was a failure as a prophet."*

I would simply have to disagree with this statement for two reasons:

1. I can imagine many examples of something being objectively true and yet not being believed by anyone, not possessing epistemic certainty (a very difficult criterion to meet, by the way), and not even having any independently verifiable facts to back it up! For instance, suppose an angel appeared to an unbeliever and told him to repent of his sins and to put his faith in Christ for salvation. Suppose this was an objective experience, capable of sense verification (sight, hearing, touch, etc.) by anyone who happened to be present. But suppose no one was present but the unbeliever – and after having this experience, he concludes it was merely a subjective hallucination! Furthermore, suppose everyone who hears this story accepts his interpretation; namely, that the event was simply a hallucination – not an objective experience. Finally, suppose that the angel leaves absolutely no physical trace of his appearance – nothing to confirm that the appearance had been an objective event in the external world! In this case, it would be absolutely TRUE to say that an angel had appeared to this man, etc. However, no one actually BELIEVES this to be true (including the man who experienced it), it LACKS epistemic certainty, and there are NO independently verifiable facts to support that this event actually happened. The only evidence that this event actually occurred is the man's memory, which he believes pertains to a hallucination – not an actual visit from an angel. In spite of this, however, it would still be TRUE to say that the event actually occurred in the real, mind-independent, external world of the observer; it was completely objective. Such examples could be multiplied, but you get the idea.

2. Since there are good reasons to believe that the Bible is

the Word of God, I think that one can legitimately conclude that Cayce was a false prophet by biblical standards. And if this is true, then Cayce was ultimately a failure as a prophet according to the standard of the Ultimate Judge of all such matters, namely, God Himself. The Bible gives us God's standards for determining whether someone is, or is not, a true prophet. Cayce failed to meet these biblical standards. Therefore, the Christian has good grounds for believing that Cayce was not a true prophet.

I know that there are indeed those who believe that the things which Edgar Cayce spoke in his trances are true. But I hope you can see why biblical Christianity must reject that belief.

I wish you all the best,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

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## **Did Jesus Really Perform Miracles?**

*Former Probe intern Dr. Daniel Morais and Probe staffer Michael Gleghorn argue that Jesus' miracles have a solid foundation in history and should be regarded as historical fact.*

### **What Do Modern Historians Think?**

"I can believe Jesus was a great person, a great teacher. But I can't believe He performed miracles." Ever hear comments like this? Maybe you've wondered this yourself. Did Jesus really perform miracles?



Marcus Borg, a prominent member of the Jesus Seminar<sup>{1}</sup>, has stated, "Despite the difficulty which miracles pose for the modern mind, on historical grounds it is virtually indisputable that Jesus was a healer and exorcist."<sup>{2}</sup> Commenting on Jesus' ability to heal the blind, deaf, and others, A. M. Hunter writes, "For these miracles the historical evidence is excellent."<sup>{3}</sup>

Critical historians once believed that the miracles attributed to Jesus in the Bible were purely the product of legendary embellishment. Such exaggerations about Jesus' life and deeds developed from oral traditions which became more and more fantastic with time until they were finally recorded in the New Testament. We all know how tall tales develop. One person tells a story. Then another tells much the same story, but exaggerates it a bit. Over time the story becomes so fantastic that it barely resembles the original. This is what many scholars once believed happened to Jesus' life, as it's recorded in the Gospels. Is this true? And do most New Testament historians believe this today?

The answer is no. In light of the evidence for the historicity of Jesus' miracles in the Gospels, few scholars today would attempt to explain these events as purely the result of legend or myth. In fact, most New Testament scholars now believe that Jesus did in fact perform healings and exorcisms.<sup>{4}</sup> Even many liberal scholars would say that Jesus drew large crowds of people primarily because of his ability to heal and "exorcise demons."<sup>{5}</sup> But because many of these liberal scholars don't believe in spiritual beings, they also don't believe that these healings should be attributed to the direct intervention of God in the world. Instead, they believe that Jesus' miracles and healings have a purely natural explanation. Many of them think that Jesus only healed psychosomatic maladies.<sup>{6}</sup> The term *psychosomatic* means mind-body, so psychosomatic maladies are mind-body problems. The mind can have a powerful impact on the health of the body. Under

extreme distress people can become blind, deaf or even suffer paralysis. Since psychosomatic problems typically go away on their own, many liberal scholars think that faith in Jesus' ability to heal might help to heal some people suffering from these conditions. But is there good reason to believe that Jesus could cure real sicknesses?

## **Could These Miracles Be Legendary?**

Often, historians who tried to explain away stories of Jesus' miracles as purely the result of legendary developments believed that the "real" Jesus was little more than a good man and a wise teacher. The major problem with this theory is that legends take time to develop. Multiple generations would be needed for the true oral tradition regarding Jesus' life to be replaced by an exaggerated, fictitious version. For example, many historians believe that Alexander the Great's biography stayed fairly accurate for about five hundred years. Legendary details didn't begin to develop until the following five hundred years.<sup>{7}</sup> A gross misrepresentation of Jesus' life occurring one or two generations after his death is highly unlikely. Jesus was a very public figure. When He entered a town, He drew large crowds of people. Jesus is represented as a miracle worker at every level of the New Testament tradition. This includes not only the four Gospels, but also the hypothetical sayings source, called Q, which may have been written just a few years after Jesus' death. Many eyewitnesses of Christ would still have been alive at the time these documents were composed. These eyewitnesses were the source of the oral tradition regarding Jesus' life, and in light of his very public ministry, a strong oral tradition would be present in Israel for many years after his death.

If Jesus had never actually performed any miracles, then the Gospel writers would have faced a nearly impossible task in getting anyone to believe that He had. It would be like trying to change John F. Kennedy from a great president into an

amazing miracle worker. Such a task would be virtually impossible since many of us have seen JFK on TV, read about him in the papers, or even seen him in person. Because he was a public figure, oral tradition about his life is very strong even today. Anyone trying to introduce this false idea would never be taken seriously.

During the second half of the first century, Christians faced intense persecution and even death. These people obviously took the disciples' teaching about Jesus' life seriously. They were willing to die for it. This only makes sense if the disciples and the authors of the Gospels represented Jesus' life accurately. You can't easily pass off made-up stories about public figures when eyewitnesses are still alive who remember them. Oral tradition tends to remain fairly accurate for many generations after their deaths.[{8}](#)

In light of this, it's hard to deny that Jesus did in fact work wonders.

## **Conversion from Legend to Conversion Disorder**

It might be surprising to hear that Jesus is believed by most New Testament historians to have been a successful healer and exorcist.[{9}](#) Since His miracles are the most conspicuous aspect of his ministry, the miracle tradition found in the Gospels could not be easily explained had their authors started with a Jesus who was simply a wise teacher. Prophets and teachers of the law were not traditionally made into miracle workers; there are almost no examples of this in the literature available to us.[{10}](#) It's especially unlikely that Jesus would be made into a miracle worker since many Jews didn't expect that the Messiah would perform miracles. The Gospel writers would not have felt the need to make this up were it not actually the case.[{11}](#)

Of course, most liberal scholars today don't believe Jesus could heal any real illnesses. But such conclusions are reached, not because of any evidence, but because of prior prejudices against the supernatural. Secular historians deny that Jesus cured any real, organic illnesses or performed any nature miracles such as walking on water.[{12}](#) They believe He could only heal *conversion disorders* or the symptoms associated with real illnesses.[{13}](#) Conversion disorder is a rare condition that afflicts approximately fourteen to twenty-two of every 100,000 people.[{14}](#) Conversion disorders are psychosomatic problems in which intense emotional trauma results in blindness, paralysis, deafness, and other baffling impairments.

Many liberal scholars today would say that Jesus drew large crowds of people primarily because of his ability to heal. But if Jesus could only cure conversion disorders, then it's unlikely He would have drawn such large crowds. As a practicing optometrist, I've seen thousands of patients with real vision loss due either to refractive problems or pathology. But only one of them could be diagnosed with blindness due to conversion disorder. Conversion disorders are rare. In order for Jesus to draw large crowds of people He would have had to be a successful healer. But if He could only heal conversion disorders, thousands of sick people would have had to be present for him to heal just one person. But how could He draw such large crowds if He could only heal one person in 10,000? Sick people would have often needed to travel many miles to see Jesus. Such limited ability to heal could hardly have motivated thousands of people to walk many miles to see Jesus, especially if they were sick and feeble. If Jesus was drawing large crowds, He must have been able to heal more than simply conversion disorders.

## Did Jesus Raise the Dead?

“Did Jesus ever raise the dead? Is there any evidence to back this up?” Many secular historians, though agreeing that Jesus was a successful healer and exorcist, don’t believe that He could perform nature miracles. Due to prior prejudices against the supernatural, these historians don’t believe it’s possible for anyone to raise the dead, walk on water, or heal true organic diseases. These historians believe Jesus’ healings were primarily psychological in nature.[{15}](#) Is there any evidence that Jesus had the power to work actual miracles such as raising the dead?

Yes. It almost seems that the more fantastic the miracle, the more evidence is available to support it. In fact, the most incredible miracle recorded in the Gospels is actually the one which has the greatest evidential support. This miracle is Jesus’ resurrection.[{16}](#) Is there any reason to believe that Jesus may have raised others from the dead as well?

There is compelling evidence to believe that He did. In John 11 there’s the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.[{17}](#) A careful reading of this text reveals many details that would be easy for anyone in the first century to confirm or deny. John records that Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. He also says that this miracle took place in Bethany where Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived, and that Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem. John’s gospel is believed to have been written in AD 90, just sixty years after the events it records. It’s possible that a few people who witnessed this event, or at least had heard of it, would still be alive to confirm it. If someone wanted to check this out, it would be easy to do. John says this took place in Bethany, and then He tells us the town’s approximate location. All someone would have to do to check this out would be to go to Bethany and ask someone if Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, had ever been raised from the dead. Villages were

generally small in those days and people knew each other's business. Almost anyone in that town could easily confirm or deny whether they had ever heard of such an event. If John just made this story up, he probably wouldn't have included so much information that could be easily checked out by others to see if he was lying. Instead, he probably would have written a vague story about Jesus going to some unnamed town where He raised some unnamed person from the dead. This way no one could confirm or deny the event. John put these details in to show that he wasn't lying. He wanted people to investigate his story. He wanted people to go to Bethany, ask around, and see for themselves what really happened there.

## **What Did Jesus' Enemies Say?**

"Sure, Jesus' followers believed He could work miracles. But what about his enemies, what did they say?" If Jesus never worked any miracles, we would expect ancient, hostile Jewish literature to state this fact. But does such literature deny Jesus' ability to work miracles? There are several unsympathetic references to Jesus in ancient Jewish and pagan literature as early as the second century AD. But none of the ancient Jewish sources deny Jesus' ability to perform miracles.[{18}](#) Instead, they try to explain these powers away by referring to him as a sorcerer.[{19}](#) If the historical Jesus were merely a wise teacher who only later, through legendary embellishments, came to be regarded as a miracle worker, there should have been a prominent Jewish oral tradition affirming this fact. This tradition would likely have survived among the Jews for hundreds of years in order to counter the claims of Christians who might use Jesus' miraculous powers as evidence of his divine status. But there's no evidence that any such Jewish tradition portrayed Jesus as merely a wise teacher. Many of these Jewish accounts are thought to have arisen from a separate oral tradition apart from that held by Christians, and yet both traditions agree on this point.[{20}](#) If it were

known that Jesus had no special powers, these accounts would surely point that out rather than reluctantly affirm it. The Jews would likely have been uncomfortable with Jesus having miraculous powers since this could be used as evidence by his followers to support his self-proclaimed status as the unique Son of God (a position most Jews firmly denied). This is why Jesus' enemies tried to explain his powers away as sorcery.

Not only do these accounts affirm Jesus' supernatural abilities, they also seem to support the ability of his followers to heal in his name. In the Talmud, there's a story of a rabbi who is bitten by a venomous snake and calls on a Christian named Jacob to heal him. Unfortunately, before Jacob can get there, the rabbi dies.[{21}](#) Apparently, the rabbi believed this Christian could heal him. Not only did Jews seem to recognize the ability of Christians to heal in Christ's name, but pagans did as well. The name of Christ has been found in many ancient pagan spells.[{22}](#) If even many non-Christians recognized that there was power to heal in Christ's name, there must have been some reason for it.

So, a powerful case can be made for the historicity of Jesus' miracles. Christians needn't view these miracles as merely symbolic stories intended to teach lessons. These miracles have a solid foundation in history and should be regarded as historical fact.

## Notes

1. Gary R. Habermas, "Did Jesus Perform Miracles?," in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, by eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 124.
2. Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus, A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and The Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 61.
3. A.M. Hunter, *Jesus: Lord and Saviour* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 63.

4. Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 124.
5. See Borg, *Jesus, A New Vision*, 60.
6. Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 125.
7. Craig L. Blomberg, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 33.
8. Grant R Jeffrey, *The Signature of God* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998) 102, 103.
9. Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 124, 125.
10. Smith, *Jesus the Magician: Charlatan or Son of God?* (Berkeley: Seastone, 1998), 21.
11. Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus, The Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 247.
12. Ibid.
13. Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 125.
14. See the National Organization for Rare Diseases' official Web site at [www.rarediseases.org/nord/search/rdbdetail\\_fullreport\\_pf](http://www.rarediseases.org/nord/search/rdbdetail_fullreport_pf) (5/04/2006).
15. Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 125.
16. William Lane Craig, "The Empty Tomb of Jesus," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, by eds. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 247-261 and Gary R. Habermas, "The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," Ibid., 261-275.
17. John. 11:1-44.
18. See Alan Humm, "Toledoth Yeshu," at [ccat.sas.upenn.edu/humm/Topics/JewishJesus/toledoth.html](http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/humm/Topics/JewishJesus/toledoth.html) (2/17/1997).
19. Ibid.
20. Twelftree, *Jesus, The Miracle Worker*, 255.
21. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 63.
22. Ibid., 83.



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# “Do You Know Why My Dreams Come True?”

I have been searching for a long time for the answer to a very curious question. I'm a 15 yr old boy, and for a long time I have been having dreams that come true. I'm not sure why. I was wondering if you had any educated guesses. On more than one occasion these dreams have saved my hide, and have never led me away from God. On the contrary, they have strengthened my faith in Him. But the only thing they don't "shine a light on" is why. I remind myself every day to be humble, but I can't help wondering if I'm "special." I was just wondering if you could give me some insight. I am SURE it's not Satan, dreams aren't my only specialty. If I concentrate—really hard—I can see through deception. I'm also an empath: I can feel other people's emotions. And finally, I can heal people, but not like they do on tv. It's different. It's more like I feel their pain and fix that, not their body. Anyways, if you have any ideas, please let me know.

P.S.- I'm not crazy, promise.

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

First of all, I believe you. You are describing a supernatural kind of life where the power comes from God and not yourself, and that is the kind of "abundant life" that Jesus was talking about bringing to us.

*I have been having dreams that come true. I'm not sure why. I was wondering if you had any educated guesses. On more than one occasion these dreams have saved my hide, and have never led me away from God. On the contrary, they have strengthened my faith in Him. But the only thing they don't "shine a light*

*on" is why.*

Concerning your dreams—I think that God communicates to us in dreams all the time, but most of us aren't listening. People in the Bible gave a great deal of weight to dreams, and God spoke to people through dreams fairly frequently. So your experience is within the boundaries of what is biblically valid. Others have written to me about the same thing, by the way. I think that as long as your dreams continue to draw you to God and strengthen your faith and relationship with Him, it's a gift for which you can give thanks and enjoy. The important thing is to continue to ask Him for HIS wisdom and interpretation.

*I remind myself every day to be humble, but I can't help wondering if I'm "special."*

Are you special? Absolutely—in the same way that God makes all of us special, and gives us special gifts, abilities, talents and passions, so that we can be like stained glass windows for His light to shine through with special, unique beauty. Please remember that God gives gifts to serve Him by serving others and not for our own enjoyment, although the exercise of our gifts IS a blessing to us. So I encourage you to always be looking to see your gifts as a way to serve rather than to draw attention or glory to yourself.

*I was just wondering if you could give me some insight. I am SURE it's not Satan, dreams aren't my only specialty. If I concentrate—really hard—I can see through deception.*

That sounds like it might be the spiritual gift of discernment, the ability to distinguish between spirits (1 Cor. 12:10). People with that gift are able to spot phonies and liars, as well as to tell when there is evil present. This is an ability that the Holy Spirit gives, and is not a natural

ability. The purpose of this gift is to function like an early warning system for the Body of Christ, so the rest of us—who don't have this gift—can be warned of unseen realities that would hurt us or trick us.

*I'm also an empath: I can feel other people's emotions. And finally, I can heal people, but not like they do on tv. It's different. It's more like I feel their pain and fix that, not their body. Anyways, if you have any ideas, please let me know.*

The gift of healings is also a spiritual gift (see 1 Cor. 12:9), and again, the purpose of this gift is to bless and serve others. It's entirely possible that God uses you as His channel of blessing to others to heal their emotional pain.

I do want to make sure, though, that you understand it is essential to be *excruciatingly* discerning about your dreams, exposing them and your interpretations of them to the light of Scripture. If God is speaking to you through your dreams, it will always—ALWAYS!—be consistent with what He has said in His Word, and never contradict either His Word or His character as revealed in His Word.

Let me know if this makes sense, and especially if these answers bring you peace. I do believe that God leads us and confirms things through the presence—and absence—of His peace.

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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# Evaluating Miracle Claims

*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*



## Are They Alien Events?

I recently spoke with a Christian woman who told me of the concern she felt for many of her family members who had embraced the doctrines of Christian Science. As we discussed how she might effectively communicate the gospel to those she loved, she mentioned one of the main difficulties she faced in getting a fair hearing. Apparently, some of her family members had been surprisingly healed of various physical ailments. And naturally enough, they interpreted these healings as confirming the truth of Christian Science.

What are we, as Christians, to make of such claims? Are they miracles? What are we to think about the many sincere people, holding vastly different beliefs, who claim to have personally experienced miracles? And what about many of the world's great religious traditions that claim support for their doctrines, at least in part, by an appeal to the miraculous? Should we assume that all such claims are false and that only Christian miracle claims are true? Or might some miracles have actually occurred outside a Judeo-Christian context? Are there any criteria we can apply in evaluating miracle claims to help us determine whether or not a miracle has actually occurred? And could there be other ways of explaining such claims besides recourse to the miraculous?

Before we attempt to answer such questions, we must first agree on what a "miracle" is. Although various definitions have been used in the past, we will rely on a definition given by Richard Purtill. "A miracle is an event brought about by the power of God that is a temporary exception to the ordinary course of nature for the purpose of showing that God has acted in history."<sup>[1]</sup> A miracle, then, requires a personal,

supernatural being who is capable of intervening in nature to bring about an effect that would otherwise not have occurred.

If this is what miracles are, then some religions have no real way of accounting for them. Take Christian Science for instance. "The Christian Science view of God is impersonal and *pantheistic*." {2} In this system, "miracles" can be nothing more than "divinely natural" events. {3} But if a true miracle requires the intervention of a personal being who is beyond nature, then Christian Science has no place for such events because it does not admit the existence of such a being. As David Clark has stated: "Pantheism has no category labeled 'free act by a divine person.' So miracles are as alien to all forms of pantheism as they are to atheism." {4} Thus, far from demonstrating the truth of Christian Science, a genuine miracle would actually demonstrate its falsity! While such events may still have occurred, they can hardly be used as evidence in support of such traditions

## Are They Legendary Events?

Apollonius of Tyana was, like Jesus, a traveling first century teacher. Like Jesus, he is credited with having performed a variety of miraculous feats. He is said to have healed the sick, cast out demons and predicted the future. He is even said to have raised the dead!

In a fascinating passage from his biography we read the following:

*A girl had died...and the whole of Rome was mourning...Apollonius...witnessing their grief, said: 'Put down the bier, for I will stay the tears that you are shedding for this maiden'....The crowd...thought that he was about to deliver...an oration...but merely touching her and whispering in secret some spell over her, at once woke up the maiden from her seeming death..." {5}*

Readers familiar with the Gospel of Luke will recognize that this story is quite similar to the account of Jesus raising the widow's son (Luke 7:11-17). But isn't it inconsistent for Christians to affirm that Jesus really did perform such a miracle while denying the same for Apollonius? Not necessarily.

Suppose that the story about Apollonius is merely legendary, while the story about Jesus is truly historical. If that were so, then it would clearly make sense for Christians to deny that Apollonius raised someone from the dead while simultaneously affirming that Jesus really did perform such a feat. There are actually good reasons for believing that this is in fact the case.

Norman Geisler draws a number of significant contrasts between the evidence for Jesus and that for Apollonius.<sup>[6]</sup> First, the only source we have for the life of Apollonius comes from Philostratus. In contrast, we have numerous, independent sources of information about the life of Jesus. These include the four canonical gospels, many New Testament letters, and even extra-biblical references in writers like Tacitus, Josephus and others. Second, Philostratus wrote his biography about 120 years after Apollonius' death. The New Testament was written by those who were contemporaries and/or eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus. The point, of course, is that the further one gets from the original events, the more likely it is that accounts may become contaminated by later legendary developments. Third, Philostratus was commissioned to write his work by the wife of a Roman emperor, most likely as a means of countering the growing influence of Christianity. He thus had a motivation to embellish his account and make Apollonius appear to be the equal of Jesus. The New Testament writers, however, had no such motivation for embellishing the life of Jesus. Finally, Philostratus admits that the girl Apollonius allegedly raised may not have even been dead!<sup>[7]</sup> Luke, however, is quite clear that the widow's son was dead

when Jesus raised him.

This brief comparison reveals that not all miracle claims are as historically well-attested as those of Jesus.

## Are They Psychosomatic Events?

Amazing healings are among the most frequently cited miracle claims. Although many of these claims may be false, many are also true. But are they really miracles?

Some estimates indicate that up to 80 percent of disease is stress related. While such diseases are real, and really do afflict the body, they originate largely from negative mental attitudes, anxiety and other unhealthy emotions. For this reason, such diseases can often be healed through a reduction in stress, combined with positive mental attitudes and healthy emotions. But such healings should not be viewed as miracles because they do not involve God's direct, supernatural intervention.

If this is true, then we must carefully distinguish between psychosomatic events and those that are truly miraculous. Psychosomatic illnesses have psychological or emotional (rather than physiological) causes. Thus, people afflicted with such disorders may get better simply by coming to believe that they *can* get better. In other words, psychosomatic disorders can often be alleviated simply by faith—whether in God, a priest, a doctor, a pill, or a particular method of treatment. But there is nothing miraculous about this kind of healing. “It happens to Buddhists, Hindus, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and atheists. Healers claiming supernatural powers can do it, but so can...psychiatrists by purely natural powers...”<sup>{9}</sup> Obviously, healings of this sort cannot be used as evidence for a particular belief system because all belief systems can account for them.

But are there any differences between supernatural and

psychological healings that might help us decide whether or not a particular healing was truly miraculous? Norman Geisler lists a number of important distinctions.[{10}](#) First, supernatural healings do not require personal contact. Jesus occasionally healed people from a distance (John 4:46-54). In contrast, psychological healings often do require such contact, even if this simply involves laying one's hands on the television while an alleged faith-healer prays. Second, when a person is healed supernaturally there are no relapses. But relapses are common after psychological healings. Finally, a person can be healed of *any* condition by supernatural means, including organic diseases and major birth defects. Jesus healed a man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1-5) and restored the sight of one born blind (John 9). In contrast, not all conditions can be healed psychologically. Such methods are usually effective only in treating psychosomatic illnesses.

Thus, not every claim for miraculous healing is a genuine miracle. Only those healings that offer clear evidence of Divine intervention can fairly be considered miracles.

## **Are They Deceptive Events?**

It appeared to be a miracle. The young man claimed he could see without an eye! Norman Geisler recounts an amazing demonstration he once witnessed in a seminary chapel back in the early 70s.[{11}](#) It involved a young man who had injured his left eye as a child. It was later surgically removed and replaced with a glass eye. For three years his father prayed, asking God to restore his son's vision. One day, his son excitedly announced that he could see with his glass eye! His father believed that God had worked a miracle. And apparently he wasn't the only one.

At the chapel service the young man's father shared how the physicians who had examined his son had confirmed that his vision had been restored despite the removal of the young man's eye! The demonstration seemed to prove that this was



indeed the case. The young man's glass eye was removed and his good eye was covered with a blindfold that had been inspected by one of the students in the audience. After various items had been randomly collected from those in attendance, the young man proceeded to read what was written on them! Needless to say, all who witnessed the performance were stunned by what appeared to be a genuine miracle. But was there another explanation? Although he initially thought that he had witnessed a miracle, Dr. Geisler later came to believe that he might have been deceived. But why?

It turns out that any skilled performer of magic tricks can do the very same thing. By applying some invisible lubricant to the cheek before a performance begins, the magician can have coins and clay placed over his eyes, along with a blindfold, and still read what has been handed to him. How is this possible? Dr. Geisler explains: "By lifting his forehead under the bandages, a small gap is made down the bridge of his nose through which he can see. It is not a miracle; it is magic."[\[12\]](#)

Since magic can often appear miraculous, we must carefully evaluate miracle claims for clear evidence of divine intervention. What are some differences between miracles and magic that may keep us from being deceived?[\[13\]](#)

First, miracles are of God and serve to glorify God. Magic is of man and usually serves to glorify the magician. Second, no deception is involved in miracles. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he was really dead, and had been for four days (John 11:39). But deception is an essential component of human magic. Finally, a miracle fits into nature in a way that magic does not. When Jesus healed the man born blind (John 9), He restored the proper function of his natural eyes. By contrast, in the story above the young man claimed to see without an eye at all! While one is clearly of God, the other is simply odd.

## Are They Demonic Events?

The Bible affirms the existence of both Satan and demons, evil spirit beings with personal attributes who are united in their opposition to God and His plans for the world. Although vastly inferior to God, they still possess immense intelligence and power. Is it possible that at least some of the apparently miraculous phenomena reported in the world's religions and the occult might be due to demonic spirits?

The book of Exodus seems to indicate that the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate the first two plagues that God brought upon their land (Exod. 7:22; 8:7). How should this be explained? While some believe the magicians relied on human trickery, [{14}](#) others think that demonic spirits may have aided them. [{15}](#)

Although we cannot know for sure which view is correct, the demonic hypothesis is certainly possible. Indeed, the Bible elsewhere explicitly affirms the power of Satan and demons to perform amazing feats. For instance, Luke tells of a slave-girl "having a spirit of divination...who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling" (Acts 16:16). Undoubtedly this was a demonic spirit for Luke records that Paul cast it out "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:18). This enraged the girl's masters because apparently, once the demon had been exorcised, the girl no longer retained her special powers (Acts 16:19).

In addition, Paul told the Thessalonians that the coming of the end-time ruler would be in "accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). In Revelation 13 we read that Satan gives his power and authority to this wicked ruler, apparently even healing his otherwise fatal wound to the head (Rev. 13:3). Not only this, but the ruler's assistant is also said to perform "great signs" (v. 13). For instance, he is said to make fire come down from heaven and to give breath and

the power of speech to an image of the ruler (vv. 13-15). The text implies that these wonders are accomplished through the power of Satan (v. 2).

This brief survey indicates that Satan and demonic spirits can indeed perform false signs and wonders that may initially appear to rival even genuinely Divine miracles. The book of Revelation tells us that the world of unregenerate humanity, deceived by such amazing signs, proceeds to worship both Satan and the ruler (Rev. 13:4). But how can we, as Christians, keep from being likewise deceived? In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts believers to put on "the full armor of God." Among other things, this involves taking up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (see Eph. 6:10-17). If we have faith in Christ Jesus, and if we are protected by "the full armor of God," we won't be easily deceived by "the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).

## Notes

1. Richard L. Purtill, "Defining Miracles," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, eds. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 72.
2. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions and the Occult* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1990), 111.
3. Norman L. Geisler, in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, s.v. "Miracles, Magic and," (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 476.
4. David K. Clark, "Miracles in the World Religions," in Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, 203.
5. Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. F.C.

Conybeare (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1912 [Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1]), 457-459, cited in Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 83.

6. Norman L. Geisler, in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, s.v., "Apollonius of Tyana," 44-45.

7. See Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 85.

8. Kenneth Pelletier, *Christian Medical Society Journal* 11, no. 1 (1980), cited in Geisler, "Healings, Psychosomatic," *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 301.

9. Norman L. Geisler, "Apollonius of Tyana," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 44-45.

10. *Ibid.*, 118-122.

11. The story is told in Norman Geisler, *Signs and Wonders* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 59-60.

12. *Ibid.*, 60.

13. I take these criteria from Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 73-76.

14. See Dan Korem, *Powers: Testing the Psychic and Supernatural* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 172-176.

15. See John D. Hannah, "Exodus," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), 118.

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# Reiki: A Christian Perspective

*Michael Gleghorn offers an overview and critical Christian worldview evaluation of Reiki energy medicine, an alternative health therapy that has grown in popularity in recent years.*

## What is Reiki?

In the past twenty-five years there has been a huge increase in both the general acceptance and public availability of various types of alternative health therapies. Although some of these therapies may be beneficial, others do little good, and some are downright harmful. Under the broad umbrella of alternative medicine there are a variety of therapies that might loosely be referred to as “energy medicine”:

*Energy medicine is a broad field covering a variety of therapies from many parts of the world. While each is based on the existence of a nonphysical energy pervading the universe, the nature of the energy, the form of therapies, and how healing is believed to take place varies from culture to culture.*[\[1\]](#)

This energy is variously referred to as *prana* in India, *chi* in China, and *ki* in Japan. One form of energy medicine that has been growing in popularity is called *Reiki*. According to some, *rei* means “universal,” and *ki* means “life force energy.” But the International Center for Reiki Training goes further, declaring that “Rei” is more accurately understood to mean “supernatural knowledge or spiritual consciousness . . . the wisdom that comes from God or the Higher Self.” Thus, according to the Center, “it is the God-consciousness called

Rei that guides the life force called Ki in the practice we call Reiki.”{2}

Reiki was discovered, or perhaps rediscovered, by Dr. Mikao Usui during a mystical experience at a mountain retreat in early twentieth century Japan. Some claim it is the same method of healing used by both the Buddha and Jesus, although the records of this have been lost.{3}

So how does Reiki work? To put it generally, and somewhat simply, Reiki claims to work by removing obstructions to the free flow of life force energy throughout the body. Such obstructions, which arise through negative thoughts, actions, and feelings, are believed to be the fundamental cause of illness and disease. But “Reiki clears, straightens and heals the energy pathways, thus allowing the life force to flow in a healthy and natural way.”{4} In this way, Reiki is believed to enhance physical, mental and emotional health.

In order to tap into this power and learn to channel Reiki one must first receive four attunements from a Reiki Master during a First Degree Reiki training session. These attunements are alleged to open “subtle mental and physical energy systems” that prepare the recipient “to channel Universal Life Force Energy.”{5} Supposedly, this creates a permanent connection with Reiki, thus allowing the recipient to channel this energy for life.

At this point, some may be wondering if there is any scientific evidence that corroborates the existence of this energy. Let’s look at the evidence.

## **Is there Scientific Support for Reiki?**

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some proponents of life force energy claimed it was a form of electromagnetic radiation (of which light and heat are familiar examples).{6} Of course, electromagnetic radiation is a real, physical

phenomenon of the world in which we live. But should it be identified with life force energy? The answer is no, and today most of those who believe in such energy would say the same. After all, such energy is generally believed to be non-physical. But electromagnetic radiation is a form of physical energy.

Still, many Reiki practitioners believe that good evidence supports the existence of life force energy. For example, the aura is said to be “a field of subtle life-force energy that surrounds the body of every living being.”[\[7\]](#) Those properly attuned to this energy often claim that they can feel a person’s aura. A few even claim to see auras.

But it’s one thing to make such a claim, quite another to demonstrate it under properly supervised conditions. In one study, ten people who claimed to see auras were tested against a control group of ten people who made no such claim. “Four identical screens were placed in a room with volunteers who took turns standing behind one or another of them.”[\[8\]](#) Those who claimed to see auras believed that they could detect which screen the volunteer was standing behind. But out of 720 attempts, they only gave 185 correct answers – an accuracy rate consistent with guessing. The control group, however, gave 196 correct answers – eleven more than those who claimed to see auras! Apparently, not everyone who claims to see auras can actually demonstrate this claim.

But haven’t auras been photographed? One author claims, “Kirlian photography . . . enables us to . . . photograph auras.”[\[9\]](#) However, when such photographs are investigated by independent scientists, the images are seen to have a completely physical explanation. Also, Kirlian auras have been recorded for some things not usually believed to have a field of life force energy, like pennies and paper clips. Such evidence casts doubt on the claim that auras have been photographed.

Thus, if there is such a thing as life force energy, it has so far eluded the detection of scientists. Such energy may still exist, and science may one day verify as much. But for now, scientific support is lacking. Still, some argue that “the proof of whether a therapeutic procedure is effective rests not on the gathering of data alone but on the client’s actual experience.”[{10}](#) In other words, if Reiki works, such life force energy must exist!

## What About Reiki’s Success?

For many people, the most powerful evidence of Reiki’s effectiveness as an alternative health therapy are the testimonials of those who claim to have been personally helped by it. Consider what happened to Alex. He was in chronic pain due to a motorcycle accident that resulted in three crushed vertebrae. He attended a Reiki class, and after his first initiation was free of persistent pain![{11}](#)

How does one explain such a story? Does it prove that Reiki really works? While it cannot be denied that there is abundant anecdotal evidence of Reiki’s healing power, we must be very careful before we credit Reiki with relieving Alex’s pain. “With the exception of unsubstantiated opinion, anecdotal evidence is the least useful...evidence available to judge medical therapies.”[{12}](#)

This isn’t just the opinion of conventional Western medicine. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine acknowledges that there is a “hierarchy in the different types of evidence for therapies, with anecdotal at the bottom.”[{13}](#) Thus, anecdotal evidence counts for something, but it hardly *proves* that Reiki is an effective method of healing.

So how might we explain Alex’s pain relief? Although there are various possibilities, for the sake of time we will only mention two. First, we must honestly acknowledge that maybe Reiki *was* responsible for the elimination of Alex’s pain.



After all, it was immediately after receiving Reiki that Alex felt relief. However, it's crucial to recognize that there is another very sensible and well-documented explanation. Quite simply, Alex's pain relief may have been due to the "placebo effect."

"The placebo effect is the combination of factors that give therapies beneficial effects, but which are not caused by any direct physiological action."[\[14\]](#) A classic example is the sugar pill. In itself it can neither cure illness nor relieve pain. However, when given to a patient by a trusted, confident physician, who says it's just what the patient needs to recover from his or her ailments, it can be incredibly effective in relieving a wide variety of psychosomatic disorders. Since such disorders have a psychological or emotional (rather than physiological) cause, they can be relieved without directly treating the patient's body.

Many studies indicate that the placebo effect can account for a full third (or more) "of the improvements found with any therapy."[\[15\]](#) But can it explain Alex's sudden relief from pain? Indeed it can. Pain can be treated very effectively with placebos.

Of course, some may argue that the really important thing is not so much *why* Alex was healed, but simply *that* he was healed! To some degree, I can sympathize with this argument. But it does have problems.

## **Should Christians Be Concerned About Reiki?**

Most people, myself included, consider physical health to be good and valuable. All things being equal, it's better to be healthy than sick. But if this is so, then does it really matter *how*, or *why*, the sick are healed? Isn't the only important thing simply *that* they're healed? And how can anyone object to Reiki if it helps accomplish this?

These are important questions and they deserve a sympathetic response. But first, let's consider an important question: Is physical health *always* preferable to sickness? After all, most people consider such qualities as compassion, patience, courage, and love to be great and noble virtues. But what if there were people who could only acquire such virtues through the pain and suffering brought on by physical illness? So long as they're healthy, they will lack these virtues. But if they're sick, they will acquire them. Let me suggest that if you truly value these virtues, you might decide that it's better to be morally and spiritually healthy (though physically sick), than physically healthy alone.

Let's now return to our initial question. Does it really matter *if, how, and why* Reiki works? I think it does. Suppose there is no genuine power in Reiki. Suppose it "works" merely as a placebo. In that case, would you want to send a loved one to a Reiki practitioner to be treated for strep throat? Without proper treatment this would likely result in rheumatic fever, permanent heart disease, and maybe even death. Real antibiotics are needed; a placebo cannot cure this kind of infection.[{16}](#) Under circumstances such as these, I suspect that no one would want their loved ones treated by Reiki alone.

But now suppose that there *is* genuine power in Reiki. Is it not important to know *where* this power comes from and *what* it is? What if Reiki offers physical health only at the expense of spiritual health? Should Christians be concerned about this?

The International Center for Reiki Training describes Reiki as "spiritually guided life force energy."[{17}](#) After receiving the necessary attunements, a Reiki practitioner can channel this energy for life. The Center describes the attunement process as "a powerful spiritual experience" that "is guided by the Rei or God-consciousness." What's more, this experience "is also attended by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings

who help implement the process.”[{18}](#)

What are Christians to make of this? Should we be concerned about the nature of this attunement process? Exactly who, or what, are these Reiki spirit guides? Should we be cautious about becoming involved with these spirits? Or should we simply trust that they’re doing God’s work? After all, doesn’t *all* healing come from God?

## **Does All Healing Come From God?**

Does all healing come from God? The International Center for Reiki Training declares that “Reiki comes from God.”[{19}](#) But if we read the material on their Web site, we see that the Center advocates an Eastern or New Age view of “God.” This view is radically different from that of the Bible. For example, the Center equates “God” with man’s Higher Self, thus blurring the distinction between God and humanity that is taught in the Bible. Practically speaking, this difference between the God of the Bible and the “God” of Eastern or New Age philosophy means that adherents of these two systems are asserting something very different when they claim to have been healed by God.

The God of the Bible is a personal being, capable of miraculously healing people according to His will (Exod. 15:26). Nevertheless, the Bible does not teach that *all* signs and wonders come from God. On the contrary, Jesus warned His disciples that in the last days there would be false Christs and false prophets who would show great signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul linked such events to the power of Satan (2 Thess. 2:9).

But does Satan have the power to perform marvelous healings? Indeed, it appears that he might. In Revelation 13 we learn that after receiving power from Satan, the beast is healed of

a near-fatal head wound (vv. 2-3). The context seems to imply that this amazing healing is the work of Satan. From a biblical perspective, this raises an important question about the healing power of Reiki. Exactly where does this healing energy come from?

We've already seen that there is not convincing evidence to regard this energy as a physical phenomenon. Biblically, this seems to leave only two main options. Either the energy comes from God, or it does not. Although the International Center for Reiki Training declares that "Reiki comes from God," we've already seen that this cannot be the God of the Bible. Is it possible, then, that the source of this energy is demonic?

As I mentioned previously, the ability to channel life force energy involves first going through an attunement process. The Center claims that these attunements are attended "by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings who help implement the process."<sup>{20}</sup> Is it possible that by involving themselves with spirit guides, Reiki practitioners may unwittingly be opening themselves, as well as their patients, to demonic influences? Although it may not be possible to categorically affirm that the source of Reiki energy medicine is demonic, the Bible, in condemning all forms of spiritism, does seem to at least allow for this possibility (see Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:9-14; Acts 16:16-18). Therefore, it seems to me that Christians should take the wiser, safer, and probably even healthier course of action, and carefully avoid all involvement with Reiki energy medicine.

## Notes

1. Donald O'Mathuna & Walt Larimore, *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 193.
2. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).
3. Gary P. Stewart, et al. *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What is Good and What*

- is Not?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998), 61.
4. "Reiki FAQ: How Does Reiki Work?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/HowDoesReikiWork.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/HowDoesReikiWork.html).
  5. David F. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners: Mastering Natural Healing Techniques* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 2000), 41-42.
  6. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 195. I have relied heavily on the chapter on "Energy Medicine," pp. 193-99, in this section.
  7. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners*, 106.
  8. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 197.
  9. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners*, 106.
  10. Libby Barnett, Maggie Chambers and Susan Davidson, *Reiki Energy Medicine* (Rochester, Vt.: Healing Arts Press, 1996), 15.
  11. *Ibid.*, 29.
  12. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 115. I have relied heavily on chapter 10, "How Science Tests Therapies and Remedies," in this section.
  13. *Ibid.*, 116.
  14. *Ibid.*, 118.
  15. *Ibid.*, 124.
  16. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 487.
  17. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).
  18. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html).
  19. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).
  20. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html).