

## **The Wonderful You**

“Make of yourself a light”, said the Buddha upon his death. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.” Both Jesus and Buddha knew that they were light, and people were drawn to them. They knew it was easier to idolize teachers than to actually listen to what they said and live accordingly. I imagine both of them saying different versions of “Don’t you get it? It’s not about me! You\_\_\_ you are the light of the world.”

The light of the world was a common expression in Jewish tradition at the time of Jesus. Rabbis taught that God was the light of the world, or that the Torah or the tribe of Israel was the light of the world. So saying “You are the light of the world” to ordinary people, most of whom were poor and struggling, was something radically different. Different ways to understand this might be: You are like God, Or You have God in you Or, Your heart is as important as the Torah. It would have startled most people. It would have enraged the priests as blasphemy. It would also have given people hope.

Today, I am going to use stories and scientific studies to illustrate that you are the light; that you are wonderful and powerful. I was listening to Elvis sing Gospel Songs the other day and one, pardon the expression, struck a chord; "It is no secret what God can do." The thought occurred to me " but it may be a secret to many people what WE can do."

The power within us is amazing. Let me tell you a story that happened to me more than twenty years ago. Occasionally, this Church would have as a guest speaker a psychologist from the Niagara Falls, N.Y. Unitarian Congregation, Dr. Jackie Jackson. Jackie was also a well known hypnotist. I will tell you how good she was. Jackie could not take anaesthetics, so when it came to dental work or one time a back operation, she used hypnotism to allow herself to have the work done. Talk about having faith!

So Doreen Peever and I thought it would be a great idea to have Dr. Jackson give us some lessons on autohypnotism. We rounded up 8 other congregants and met at my school on four Saturdays. We did learn autohypnotism and a lot about hypnotism. On the last lesson, Jackie said to

us that we were going to work in pairs and one of the pair would take the other person on a trip. So, my wife, Margaret, was to take me on a trip. Jackie talked us down into a hypnotic state and away I went to my favourite spot, floating above the beautiful turquoise waters of the Caribbean. The sun would be shining brightly and I always could feel its heat on me, perfectly relaxed. Suddenly, my beautiful water turned grey and very rough, the sky had darkened and grey clouds were flying above me. I looked up and saw cliffs with the waves breaking against them. I thought what the devil is happening. Then Jackie brought us back. She said to Marg, "Where did you take, Jim?" Marg replied, "I know where he always go, so I took him to Scotland." Now what makes this even stranger is that neither one of us had ever been to Scotland although our roots are there and Marg's roots were in the Orkney Islands. About 6 years later when I had retired, thanks to my friends, Marg and I did visit England and Scotland. When we were on the Ferry to the Orkneys and as the island grew closer. I said to Marg, "Oh, my God! Look at the cliffs and the waves breaking on them. This is what I saw during our self hypnotic experiment." It makes you ask yourself, "Just what is the mind capable of!"

Well, it seems a great deal. With the help of our new tools, such as MRIs, scientists can study what happens in our brains and recently there has been a plethora of scientific experiments validating what we kind of knew or felt but couldn't actually prove.

In a 1994 Harvard Medical School study, volunteers repetitively played a five-fingered combination of notes on a piano. The sequence was: thumb, index finger, middle finger, ring finger, little finger, ring finger, middle finger, index finger, thumb. They did this for two hours a day for five consecutive days, while another group just imagined playing and hearing those notes for the same duration of time. At the end of the five days, the individuals' brain maps were recorded. The finger maps in the brain for the volunteers who had physically played the notes had grown, as you'd expect. The brain maps for the volunteers who had imagined playing them had also grown....amazingly, to the same extent.

Further, it's not only the brain that's activated. Since nerves connect the brain to muscles, muscles grow stronger if we picture ourselves using them. A 2004 study by scientists at the Department of Biomedical

Engineering at the Lerner Research Institute in Cleveland measured a substantial increase in strength through imagined exercise.

Thirty volunteers were involved. Some did physical training of their little finger, but others just envisioned doing it. In each session, the participants did 15 contractions at a time, real or pretend, followed by a 20-second rest period. Each session lasted 15 minutes and took place five days a week for 12 weeks. After the experiment, the scientists tested the strength of each volunteer's little finger. As expected, the group who did the physical training got stronger; their muscle strength increased by 53 per cent. But incredibly, the group who did the mental training increased their strength by 35 per cent, even though they hadn't actually "lifted a finger".

A lot of these studies I found out about when I came across a Scottish writer named David Hamilton. David has a PhD in organic chemistry and went to work for a large pharmaceutical company in Great Britain. He was doing work developing new drugs in the cardiovascular field. What began to amaze him was the placebo effect. When you are testing a new drug you always compare its results to a similar group of persons taking a sugar pill but which they think is the new drug. What began to really interest Dr.

Hamilton is that people taking the dummy drug had almost and sometimes even better results than the real drug. This is called the PLACEBO effect. Dr. Hamilton gave up his lucrative job with the pharmaceutical company and began studying scientific studies showing how powerful the mind is. He wrote books and gave lectures which he still does today. He is an interesting individual and his work gives you great hope because he has scientific proof that the Mind can actually heal the body.

So what other interesting findings are there? Did you know that optimists live longer than pessimists? A 30 year study involving 447 people was conducted by the Mayo clinic. They found that those with a more positive outlook had around a 50 percent lower risk of early death than negative thinkers and that "mind and body are linked and attitude has an impact on the final outcome, death."

A 2004 study published in the journal Archives of General Psychiatry found something similar: it concluded that there's a "protective relationship between ...optimism and all-cause mortality in old age" - that optimism protects you from illness.

Satisfaction - A study of 22,461 people by Finnish scientists found that the people who were most satisfied with their lives lived longer. They defined life satisfaction as an "interest in life, happiness...and general ease of living." They also reported that the men who were most dissatisfied with their lives were more than three times as likely to die of disease than those who were most satisfied.

You see it's not so much what happens to us in life that determines our health and happiness - it's what we do with what happens that matters most. If you live in a nice house but see someone with a nicer one, do you feel dissatisfied that your home isn't good enough? Or do you give more thought to what you love about your own house and the people who share it with you? I believe we are entering the field of thankfulness here. Spiritual teachings have said this for thousands of years. Give thanks for all your blessings and your body benefits from this.

I will just do a quickie on drugs. Dr. Hamilton believes that drugs work better because we believe in them. We can put our faith in anything or anyone, and it can heal us. But the key to harnessing the power of the mind is to recognize that it's what we focus upon that matters - what we think

and believe - and this comes from within us. We unconsciously place our trust in things that have meaning for us all the time. But note that, once again, it's the meaning that we give these things that causes healing, not the things themselves. The power lies in each of us.

Let's look at some interesting examples. Our thoughts about the colour of pills affect how well they work. Scientists at the University of Cincinnati tested blue and pink stimulants and sedatives on 57 students where both 'drugs' were actually placebos, although this was unknown to the subjects.

The blue sedatives were found to be 44 percent effective, but pink ones were only at 26 percent. The colour blue proved to be two and a half times better than pink for creating a relaxed feeling - possibly because blue is considered to be a calming colour. But if blue has a different meaning in another culture, you would expect the results to be different - and this is indeed the case.

Pharmaceutical companies often choose names for drugs that enhance their perceived effects. Look at the pill Viagra for men with erectile disfunction problems. The name suggests vigor or sounds like Niagara,



which creates a perception of vigorousness and power. If it had been called “FLOPPY”, do you think it would have worked so well?

There's lots more that could be said about this topic but I am going to finish with a demonstration of the power of mind, the power of attention, the power of awareness. This experience is called the Growing-Finger Exercise and I would like you all to participate. I will first tell you how it is done and you can go through it physically as I explain what to do and then, you will go through the actual steps again as I read the directions. O.K.

Hold up your hand; it doesn't matter which one; palm facing you, and find the horizontal line, or crease, that runs along the bottom of your hand at the top of your wrist Locate the same horizontal crease on your other hand. Place your wrists together so that the two creases line up exactly with each other Now carefully bring your palms and fingers together. Your hands should line up perfectly in prayer like fashion.

Look at your two middle fingers. They will either be even in length or one will be shorter than the other. For this exercise, you will pick the shorter finger. If your fingers are even, you get to choose either the right or the left one.

Separate your hands and place them in your lap. Look at the middle finger you chose and think, THIS FINGER WILL GROW LONGER. Don't move the finger; just become acutely aware of it. You can do that with your eyes open or shut - it doesn't matter. Look at the finger or envision it in your mind. Focus all your awareness on that single finger; that is all. Do so for one full minute. You don't have to tell it again to grow longer. once is enough. Just provide what it needs to make the transition, which is FOCUSED AWARENESS. That one finger gets your total attention for a full minute.

After the minute has passed, measure the length of your fingers, using the creases across your wrists exactly as you did before. Note the lengths of your two middle fingers and presto...the finger that received your awareness will be longer! That's pretty amazing when you stop to think about it. (Yes, pun intended).

Are there any questions or comments?

