

# The Healing Power of Eros

By Darlene Lancer, M.A., M.F.T.

**E**ros, god of love and desire, was “the fairest of the deathless gods; he unstrings the limbs and subdues both mind and sensible thought in the breasts of all the gods and all men” (Hesiod, *Theogony*, in Abraham, 1994, pp. 120-122). No one, neither mortal nor divine, can resist his enchantment. Eros is the spirit of life, the cosmic power of love, and the procreative force of the universe, drawing things towards unity and bringing order and harmony to Chaos (Harrison, 1955, pp. 657-658). According to the Greek Orphic religion<sup>1</sup>, in the beginning there was Chaos, the creative void that gave birth to Eros, the creative impulse or spirit, and Eros was the catalyst in the formation of Gaia, the earth goddess or physical existence. Thus, Eros, also known as Shekinah among Kabbalist Hebrews, connects body and soul, as does “*ruah elohim*” in Genesis (Abraham, 1994, p. 147).

The Orphic religion celebrated life itself and the mysteries of ecstasy and love. For its followers, Eros represented divine light, epiphany, and the higher self in all its aspects of love (Harrison, 1955). Orphic reformers include such luminaries as Buddha, Christ, Pythagoras, and Wilhelm Reich. Reich’s

colleague, John Pierrakos (founder of Core Energetics), describes Eros as an awakening force, a *vibrational resonance* that shakes the body and opens the heart:

“It vibrates our core and produces an exquisite mental, physical and emotional bliss . . . it brings movement, life and hope. The ultimate manifestation of Eros is the connection with the force of creation. Eros transforms us from weak to powerful, hard to soft, rigid to flexible; it raises our consciousness to that higher level we feel when we connect with the creator through prayer, or the connection with nature we feel as we walk by the sea” (2001, pp. 14, 51-52).

### Freud, Libido, and the Pleasure Principle

Freud referred to Eros as life instinct, which he called libidinal energy. “Energy is eternal delight,” wrote William Blake; it is “the only life, and is from the body . . .” (cited in Brown, 1959, p. 147). The libido finds pleasure through the senses and all of the body’s surface, muscles, and internal organs. Infants delight in such pleasure, but with maturity it becomes focused on the genitals, and the capacity for

polymorphism is gradually repressed, although never outgrown. Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, saw man as a pleasure-seeking animal with a “deep-rooted, passionate striving for a positive fulfillment of happiness,” whose entire psychical activity is bent on seeking activities to express libido in accordance with the “pleasure principle”—the ultimate, erotic essence of our being<sup>2</sup> (cited in Brown, 1959, pp. 8, 89). Our internal health maintenance system appears to be guided by pleasure. In fact, it is our birthright. We are built for pleasure. Our brain contains centers that respond directly to pleasurable sensations. Animals will self-stimulate such centers to exhaustion, without stopping to eat, drink, or mate (Ornstein & Sobel, 1989, p. 25). Freud thought that sublimation of Eros through labor and the progress of civilization is the cause of man’s neuroses (Brown, 1959, pp. 17, 25-26). Taken too far, repression of libido turns the lack of pleasure into pain; “instinctual renunciation is the path of sickness and self-destruction” (Brown, 1959, p. 57). In attempting to understand the nature of pleasure and pain, philosophers have defined sensuous pleasure as the conscious effect of that which ad-

vances bodily life, with a corresponding general increase of potentiality. Higher pleasure is associated with a heightened sense of life and power (Marshall, 1984, quoting Hoffding, *Psychologie*, p. 172, and Baldwin, *Psychology, Feeling, and Will*, p. 126). Most healthy people have a joie de vivre; they pursue healthy pleasures and live optimistically, with zest and commitment that improves their health and prolongs their lives. They are pleasure-loving, pleasure-seeking, pleasure-creating individuals. In fact, worrying about your health is unhealthy (Ornstein & Sobel, 1989, pp. 7, 24, 46). For just as love of life is the basis of pleasure, fear of death is the basis of pain. Pain is associated with retrogression of bodily function and the system as a whole—it is a forerunner of death (Marshall, 1984, quoting Boullier, *Du Plaisir et de la Douleur*).

Freud (1961) noticed that pain is accompanied by unbound stimulation and internal excitation. With greater stimulation, pleasure decreases and “unpleasure” increases (pp. 4, 9, 33-36). The perception and anticipation of pain or stress activate the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) just as actual physical pain does, but the response will vary depending on whether the stimuli are perceived as threatening or irreversible. Hormones and chemicals are released that alert the body for action and self-defense, speeding heartbeat and respiration, raising blood pressure, and constricting blood vessels and muscles in order to fight or flee. If the “quiescent cathexis” of the ANS is high or calm, its capacity to take up the additional excitation will be greater (Freud, 1961). Still, adrenalin rush is always followed by fatigue, because the sympathetic system is catabolic, using up energy and depleting the body. The ANS is designed to absorb a shock, restabilize, and return to homeostasis, but chronic pain, stress, and trauma flood the body’s physical and psychological defenses. Contemporary scientist Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen suggests that trauma and stress are forms of information overload (in Pert, 1997, p. 275). Hence, the consequence of trauma is greater if the system’s cathexis is low. This accounts for the destructive effects of chronic stress and pain, and explains why they impoverish other systems. Freud theorized that recurring traumatic dreams recreate anxiety in an attempt to bind and master the

original stimulus that overwhelmed the system (Pert, 1997).

### Reich: Pleasure and the Mind/Body Connection

A student and colleague of Freud, Wilhelm Reich had a unitary concept of the organism and biological energy, emphasizing the functional identity of somatic and psychic processes (Sharaf, 1983, p. 214). He disagreed with Freud that a death instinct existed, and believed instead that most people feared pleasure. The tasks of therapy were to reverse the “general sympatheticotonic contraction of the organism,” reduce chronic anxiety, and increase the capacity for pleasurable functioning and flow of “orgone energy,” the primordial bio and cosmic life force (Sharaf, 1983, pp. 207-208). To Reich, motion (root of “e-motion”) and sensation are inseparable.

“Emotions flow through our body, thoughts flow through our mind; the flow of daily life, moving freely, is an experience that creates pleasure. . . . The combination of *energy* (movement) and *consciousness* creates the possibility of pleasure, joy, and ecstasy” (Perrakos, 2001, p. 13).

Reich, like Freud, believed that libido, or Eros, operates at the cellular level (Freud, 1961, p. 53) and began looking for Eros and orgone in microorganisms with an electron microscope. He discovered fluid currents within amoebas that pulsed in an alternating rhythm of contraction toward the center and expansion toward the surface. He thought these two biophysical currents or energy flows corresponded to the two basic affects of the psyche expressed by 1) the sympathetic nervous system, which contracts away from the world in anxiety, and 2) the parasympathetic nervous system, which flows outward toward the world in pleasure (Sharaf, 1983, pp. 207-208, 243; Reich, 1972, pp. 356-357). A parasympathetic disposition emphasizes pleasurable sensations, nourishing, healing, and regeneration of the body. This branch of the ANS stimulates the immune system and digestion and elimination. It is characterized by relaxed muscles, dilated blood vessels, warm and rosy skin, a strong, slow heartbeat, and deep, slow respiration. However, among his patients, Reich observed the opposite: pale, cold skin, tense muscles, shallow breathing, and high pulse and blood pressure, symptoms of chronic sympathetic nervous system

dominance, which is experienced as unpleasure, due to the lack of natural pulsation and impedance of the flow of bodily fluids. Reich thought this represented a defensive, armored stance towards life. He tested his theories by measuring the electrical potential of the skin, and showed that during pleasurable states there was an increase in charge as energy moved towards the periphery, and a decrease in flow and charge when subjects felt unpleasure. He speculated that disease resulted from such “biopathy,” a disturbance of the natural bioelectrical equilibrium of the two energy flows (Buhl, n.d.; Sharaf, 1983, p. 214).

Reich considered cancer to be a disease of contraction and putrefaction of tissue due to pleasure starvation of the organism. He was able to provide an expansive therapy treating patients with orgone energy, which stimulated the parasympathetic nervous system. It increased hemoglobin and reduced pain and tumor growth (Sharaf, 1983, pp. 214, 303-305). I attribute my own seemingly miraculous invigoration and complete cessation of chronic hip pain to the intense “orgone energy” I experienced when visiting the Amazon rain forest. The benefits diminished when I returned to the city, and completely vanished once I was back in polluted Los Angeles.

### Neurobiology of Healing

The unity of mind and body was recognized as early as Aristotle, but due to a “profound distrust of unconscious or autonomic processes,” contemporary Western man suffers from a “split between his psychological and physiological processes” (Pelletier, 1977, p. 27). Dr. Elmer Green, who pioneered biofeedback at the Mayo Clinic, paraphrased Aristotle when he wrote:

“Every change in the physiological state is accompanied by an appropriate change in the mental emotional state, conscious or unconscious, and conversely, every change in the mental emotional state, conscious or unconscious, is accompanied by an appropriate change in the physiological state” (in Pert, 1997, p. 137; see Aristotle’s *Physiognomonica*).

Today we have empirical evidence of this interdependence. Psychoneuroendocrinological and psychoneuroimmunological research supported by PET scans, radioimmunoassay, and other techniques has revealed intelligence throughout the body. Our attitudes,

emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and images are not mere abstractions, but electrochemical events with physiological effects that play an important role in fighting infection, allergies, and disease (Blair, 2000, p. 52). The body can no longer be compared to a robot controlled by the brain; instead, according to scientist Candace Pert, the mind/body organism is a complex psychosomatic "information network," linking "psyche," representing the mind, emotion, and soul, to "soma," comprised of molecules, cells, and organs. Every second, massive information is exchanged via "information substances"<sup>3</sup> (Pert, 1977, pp. 184-185-189) that interact throughout the body. "Emotions are at the nexus between matter and mind, going back and forth between the two and influencing both." Molecules of emotion affect every system of our body from head to toe; they seek wellness, demonstrating body/mind intelligence (Pert, 1977, pp. 19, 189).

The central switchboard of the body/mind is the limbic-hypothalamic system (LHS) in the brain. The hypothalamus is in the middle of the limbic system, bordering the thinking frontal cortex and ANS, which is comprised of the sympathetic, parasympathetic, and enteric nervous systems (the latter regulates the stomach and intestines, which are very sensitive to stress and psychosomatic disorders). Pleasure, pain, and other signals from the body and immune system are transmitted to the LHS. Thoughts and images are also sent there from the cortex in the form of neural impulses, which are then transduced into neurotransmitters that modulate each cell of the body via the ANS (Rossi, 1986, pp. 101-102, 107, 152). Neurotransmitters affect us more than we realize, including mood, thoughts, appetite, stress, emotion, aggression, addiction, sleep, and cell growth and division; reciprocally, our mood, thoughts, and behavior influence the neurotransmitters. The neurotransmitters, along with the hormones of the endocrine system, immunotransmitters of the immune system, and peptides of the neuropeptide system, influence feedback centers in the LHS, and also innervate lymph tissue. They can both stimulate and inhibit immune function, as does stimulation of the LHS. These interconnections support two-way communication between the mind and immunity (Pert, 1997, pp. 182-183; Rossi, 1986, pp. 109-111, 129, 146).

The neuropeptide system is a multidirectional psycho-immunoendocrine feedback network joining together the brain, glands, and immune system (including the spleen, bone marrow, and lymph nodes)—the entire organism (Pert, 1997, pp. 171-172). Neuropeptides are the physiological representation of emotion, feelings, sensation, thoughts, and drives, and they "weave the body's organs and systems into a single web that reacts to both internal and external environmental changes" (Pert, 1997, p. 158). They also produce emotional states that activate this circuit simultaneously throughout the brain and body, creating a constellation of bodily responses. For example, thoughts can release endorphin neuropeptides, and neuropeptide activity at the cellular level can create large changes in behavior, activity, and mood (Pert, 1997, pp. 38, 130, 145, 148, 621, 311). This psychosomatic communication network is the psychobiological basis of mind/body healing.

Endorphin neuropeptides are the body's natural opiates. They play a central role in carrying messages between the brain and the immune, endocrine, and autonomic nervous systems, and travel separately from the central nervous system through our fluids to communicate with each cell (Rossi, 1986, pp. 183-185, 198). Under their influence, rats swoon and roll onto their backs, with eyes closed and limbs floppy. We too are wired for pleasure and pain, which is key to our survival (Pert, 1997, pp. 63, 86). Opiate receptors that secrete endorphins are densest in the cortex, and are also found on lymphocyte and monocyte immune cells (Pert, 1997, pp. 134, 161-162, 182). Our skin that is so sensitive to touch and pleasure also plays an important role in the maturation of T-cells. Even immune cells in our bones produce and secrete neuropeptides that not only affect and respond to mood and emotion, but also regulate the routing and migration of immune cells (Pert, 1997, pp. 182-183; Rossi, 1986, pp. 152-154).

All of these biochemicals that are influenced by our thoughts, images, and feelings travel throughout the entire body within five to thirty seconds to convey information to receptors on the surface of each cell. The receptor transmits messages deep into the cell's interior, with the potential to dramatically change the cell and its internal molecules, affecting tissue and disease. A chain reaction of electrical, biochem-

ical, and genetic changes can be initiated, such as cell movement, growth, division, and the increase or decrease of proteins, enzymes, and other chemicals. Signals can also direct cancer cells to grow, move, and divide (Rossi, 1986, pp. 107-110, 129-130; Pert, 1997, pp. 24, 38, 173).

In some respects, each cell represents a holographic fractal of the body/mind, and as in a network, entry anywhere has the potential to affect the system everywhere—all points are equal. For example, when one practices slow, deep breathing, neuropeptides in the respiratory system signal neuropeptides in the brain stem, which in turn affect thoughts, feelings, and the experience of pleasure and pain (Pert, 1997, pp. 186-187). Hence, breath work is an invaluable tool in treating stress, trauma, chronic pain, and illness. Similarly, with biofeedback, self-hypnosis, relaxation techniques, and guided imagery, subjects can regulate heart rate and circulation and reduce tension and pain, and even affect the cellular function of their immune systems as measured by blood and saliva tests (Pert, 1997, pp. 188-191). Thoughts can actually enhance immune response by increasing neutrophils (that destroy viruses and bacteria) in the bloodstream (Rossi, 1986, pp. 155, 157). Moreover, our immune system can be conditioned by experience and beliefs. Experiments with mice and men have demonstrated that it has memory and can learn (Check, 1990, pp. 86-87; Pert, 1997, p. 187; Rossi, 1986, pp. 155-157). Belief and hope account for the placebo effect's success in thirty to ninety percent of research subjects, showing that our own neurochemistry can be harnessed to heal ourselves most of the time (Benson, 2000, p. xxix; Check, 1990, p. 72; Janov, 2000, p. 340).

Brain scans reveal that positive thoughts and feelings cause secretion of chemicals, such as endorphins and dopamine, with specific messages for cells to significantly alter tissue and disease, immune function, and experience of pleasure and pain. Thus, it's no surprise that lovers' extra endorphins increase their immunity and decrease their pain (Justice, 2000, p. 284; Rossi, 1986, p. 109). The positive mood and expectation of pleasure found in healthy people and happily married couples appear to boost their immunity, as well (Check, 1990, p. 94; Justice, 2000, p. 293; Ornstein & Sobel, 1989, p. 27). Joy improves cancer patients'

survival rates more significantly than either their relationships with their mates and doctors or the number of their metastatic sites (Siegel, 1989, p. 28). Similarly, uplifting feelings improve HIV-positive patients' immune resistance by 300,000 times (Rein & McCraty, 1993) and increase S-IgA levels (that protect against upper respiratory infection), while anger has a negative effect (Braden, 2000, p. 179). Even actors who portray a happy mood enhance their immune function, as do subjects hypnotized to be happy (Futerman, Kemeng, Shapiro, & Fahey, 1994, pp. 499-511; Polonsky, Knapp, Levy, & Black, 1988, p. 198).

The opposite is also true. Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and the inability to derive pleasure from activities and relationships often precipitate a decline in health (Siegel, 1989, p. 154). Depressed people have more limited patterns of thought, behavior, and responses, and, by inference, less internal communication (Pert, 1997, p. 270). Illness is highest among those who are unhappy, discontented, and have many interpersonal problems. Stress hormones, cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine negatively impact the cardiovascular and immune systems, and limit the body's ability to fight cancer (Justice, 2000, pp. 77, 148, 205). So can depression, as shown in several studies, one with recent widowers (Barnet & Barnet, 1998, p. 148; Check, 1990, pp. 82-83), and the feelings associated with divorce have nearly the same impact on the heart as does smoking over a pack of cigarettes a day. Depression appears to be a better indicator of heart disease than artery damage, high cholesterol, or cigarette smoking (Ornstein & Sobel, 1989, pp. 24, 26), perhaps because neuropeptides linked to emotion control the amount of plaque in coronary arteries (Pert, 1997, p. 189).

#### **Molecules and Eros**

Sensual and erotic feelings can neutralize the destructive effects of stress, pain, depression, and organic illness (Menninger, 1938, p. 380). Much research supports the healing power of touch. It stimulates and regulates the body's chemicals, maximizing our health more effectively than drugs (Pert, 1997, pp. 271-273). Massage and touch release the neurotransmitters serotonin and oxytocin. They inhibit the sympathetic nervous system's fight-or-flight response and production of stress hormones, and activate the para-

sympathetic nervous system, promoting immune function, relaxation of the body/mind, pain reduction, longevity, and cellular growth and repair (Barnet & Barnet, 1998, p. 212; Janov, 2000, pp. 296, 303; Justice, 2000, pp. 65, 348-349; Pert, 1997; Rossi, 1986, p. 174). Without touch, babies fail to develop normally, even if their other basic needs are met. Infant monkeys isolated without "contact comfort" later show cognitive, social, and physiological impairment, including abnormal brain chemistry; they rock endlessly back and forth, have shorter life spans and depressed immune systems, and neglect and abuse their offspring (Barnet & Barnet, 1998, pp. 115, 118-119). On the other hand, sufficient touch and nurturing in childhood create extra cortisol receptors that later help the adult recover faster from stress (Justice, 2000, p. 65). Nurturing behavior calms and heals (Janov, 2000, p. 292). Hugging stressed monkeys returns their stress levels to normal (Pert, 1997, pp. 271-273). They groom each other following a separation, which stimulates

production of serotonin (Janov, 2000, p. 929).

When an animal's belly is stroked, its oxytocin levels rise and blood pressure drops (Janov, 2000). Similarly, a nurse's comforting touch can stabilize heart function and blood pressure (Ornstein & Sobel, 1989, p. 33). Like "a mother's caress," an injection of oxytocin balances the feelings of being unloved and in pain. The greater the love, the more oxytocin, the faster one heals (Janov, 2000, pp. 295-296, 299, 305). Merely watching a film of Mother Teresa ministering to the sick can increase immunoglobulin levels; this is called the "Mother Teresa effect." The same result occurs when subjects remember someone they loved or the feeling of being deeply loved and cared for (Dossy, 1993, pp. 109-110). Feelings of love, gratitude and well being balance the ANS, producing a greater sense of control and resistance to illness (Justice, 2000, pp. 130-132). In my own experience, and that of my patients, pain is relieved and energy revived in the company of friends and loved ones. In

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
SCHOOL OF TEACHING & LEARNING

## SOMATIC STUDIES

ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR ADMISSION TO  
GRADUATE STUDY LEADING TO THE  
MA AND/OR PHD DEGREES

ADMISSION INFORMATION

CESAR SEGUIL 614-292-2332 OR SEGUIL.1@OSU.EDU

CONTENT INFORMATION

614-247-4361

PROFESSOR SY KLEINMAN KLEINMAN.1@OSU.EDU

PROFESSOR PETER PAUL PAUL.3@OSU.EDU

PROFESSOR ANNA SOTER SOTER.1@OSU.EDU

<http://education.osu.edu/edt/>

the days before my mother died, after a visit with her grandson, she went without an oxygen inhaler for twenty-four hours. It's no surprise that people with strong social networks have stronger immune systems and live longer, a factor more important than diet, exercise, and lifestyle (Berkman & Syme, 1979, pp. 109, 186-204; Justice, 2000, pp. 138, 147, 285).

For Carl Jung, Eros symbolized the psychic energy of relating and joining (Abraham, 1994, p. 147; Freud, 1961, p. 53).<sup>4</sup> It's been suggested that this connectedness operates between particles at the subatomic level, as a kind of primordial love or empathy (Dossey, 2001, p. 255). What constitutes this connectedness between people and particles that triggers chemical reactions? In addition to electromagnetic auras (seen with Kirlian photography), living systems emit vibrational tones. For example, a rosebud unfolds with its own distinctive sound, similar to one of the lower notes on a pipe organ (Breakey, 2000; [www.innerself.com/miscellaneous/music.htm](http://www.innerself.com/miscellaneous/music.htm)). Swiss scientist Hans Jenny showed that sound vibrations cause predictable movements and patterns when projected into substances. Emotions from anger to compassion are bio-electrical events that affect the human electromagnetic aura and create vibrations, which can be detected by sensors placed in the ground surrounding someone experiencing them (Breakey, 2000; Braden, 2000, pp. 187-188, 206). The vibrations of prayer, love, gratitude, and beautiful music cause the molecular structure of water to form magnificent crystals (Emoto, 2004). Presumably such feelings produce the same structures in our fluid systems that make up the

information highways and seventy-five percent of our body. Perhaps these "good vibrations" excite our cells, molecules, and atoms to resonate at a specific frequency with others.

Physicists David Bohm and Stewart Wolf argue that emotions influence quantum events (Siegel, 1989, p. 29). They also cause our DNA to change shape. Feelings of anger, stress, frustration, or fear shorten and tighten DNA, and switch off many codes. With feelings of gratitude, love, and appreciation, DNA relaxes and unwinds. More astounding, an experiment performed by the military showed that changes in a person's emotions simultaneously affected a sample taken of his DNA, despite the fact that it was in a test tube fifty miles away (Motz, 1993). Notwithstanding great physical separation, people who love each other sometimes share teleomatic events, even symptoms, through sympathetic resonance. Their minds behave non-locally, just as two quanta respond to each other non-locally (Dossey, 2001, p. 250). Thus, love can even heal at a distance.

#### Finding Pleasure

Pleasurable states and behaviors, particularly when creative and numinous, engage the healing and transformative power of Eros. Special genes, called immediate early genes and clock genes, appear to be involved with healing. In exploring the new field of psychosocial genomics, psychologist Ernest Rossi has investigated how we can modify gene expression at the cellular level for healing and self-recreation. He emphasizes the role of play, novelty, creativity, numinous experiences, happiness, humor, exercise, curiosity, and wonder in the psychosynthetic process of neurogenesis (Rossi, 2002).

Profound states of comfort, relaxation, trance, and sleep maximize healing potential, and permit deep inner work and creative reorganization to occur (Rossi, 1986, pp. 67, 139, 174). During hypnosis, doctors' suggestions induced greater blood clotting of hemophiliacs, the disappearance of warts, and the near miraculous, speedy recovery of severely burned patients (Caprio & Berger, 1964; Ornstein & Sobel, 1989,

p. 30). Techniques such as yoga, bio-feedback, hypnosis, creative visualization, meditation, and prayer reduce sympathetic nervous system activity and stimulate parasympathetic responses. This shift benefits endocrine and immune function and creates an integrated hypothalamic response, increasing the organism's quiescent cathexis and ability to bind energy (Rossi, 1986, p. 44). Entering deep comfort and relaxation during hypnosis has helped my patients with chronic pain and illness (Lancer, 2003, p. 12). In such a relaxed state, learning is also enhanced. Moshe Feldenkrais employed meditative movement in his revolutionary approach to neuromuscular re-education and healing. He believed learning should be pleasurable, and that goal setting impedes progress by creating resistance and removing us from the present moment (Bach-y-Rita, 1981, p. 40). As in creativity and play, one's attention should be focused on the immediate sensate experience.

"We need pray for no higher heaven than the pure senses can furnish, a purely sensuous life," wrote Thoreau (in Brown, 1959, p. 308). Any one of the senses is a portal to the centers in the brain that release opiates and endorphins that heal and give us pleasure when we experience music, beauty, nature, or art (Justice, 2000, p. 289; Ornstein & Sobel, 1989, p. 32). One of the first fetal sensations is rocking, floating, and moving in the womb. From subtle internal movements to martial arts, dance, and exercise, endorphins are released as we derive pleasure from the motion of our muscles, limbs, breath, tissues, fluids, and cells. Gentle holding, rocking, and stroking soothe the ANS and activate healing, as do petting animals, sunshine, and hot baths. Taking a sauna raises serotonin and endorphin levels (Ornstein & Sobel, 1989). Hugs and kisses, even purging tears can heal.

Our next pre-natal sensual experience is the sound vibration of our mother's voice. Certain voices, singing, and chanting reverberate through our tissues and bones. We innately create and respond to rhythm. Song and music bypass the cortex and stimulate spontaneous movement, memory, and emotion. Sound and rhythm can slow down and entrain the body/mind to maximize healing. Certain frequencies, such as a waltz, have been shown to positively affect the ANS and the release of endorphin hormones, while

### -Definition-

## SOMA:

The body experienced  
from within

reducing stress hormones. The sound of babbling water, rain, waves, chimes, wind in the trees, or a caring voice can have the same calming effect. Common measurable improvements are respiration, heart rate, blood pressure, and conductivity of the skin (Breakey, 2000). The beneficial effect has been compared to 2.5 mg. of Valium. Hayden's *Cello Concerto in C* and Bach's *Air on the G-String* are used in intensive care units to reduce pain and anxiety and speed post-operative recovery, and to supplement treatment for cancer, stroke, arthritis, and kidney dialysis (Ornstein & Sobel, 1989, pp. 59-61, 63). Music reduces the need for anesthesia and pain medication. Some patients with Alzheimer's disease and autism respond positively to treatment with music. It also helps some Parkinson's patients to relax their rigid muscles and move their hands over a piano keyboard, even though they are frozen when attempting to feed or dress themselves (Breakey, 2000).

Spending time in nature, watching a fire, animals, or babies playing, seeing beautiful art, a sunrise, sunset, or rainbow can spark feelings of awe or unity associated with Eros. Gazing at an aquarium is as effective as hypnosis in reducing pain, anxiety, and blood pressure (Ornstein & Sobel, 1989, p. 56). Pleasurable views of water and plants induce relaxation and alpha brain waves. Post-op patients who have tree views require less medication and can be released sooner (Justice, 2000). Norman Cousins completely reversed painful ankylosing spondylites by supplementing medical treatment with visualization, laughter, and the love of family and friends. When he watched five minutes of Charlie Chaplin videos, his pain was relieved for several hours. After a heart attack he did the same, ignoring his doctor's warning to have bypass surgery (Check, 1990, pp. 32, 50). He attributed his healing to laughter and the endorphins that elevated his mood (Pert, 1997, p. 167). Research has since confirmed that watching an hour of comedy lowers stress hormones and boosts immunity by increasing lymphocytes (Applegate, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1997; Pert, 1997, pp. 28, 218).

Aromatherapy has been effective for treating insomnia, anxiety, panic attacks, back pain, migraine, and food cravings. Imagine the smell of flowers, soap, incense, or perfume. A whiff of spiced apple can modify stress responses and stimulate the parasympathetic

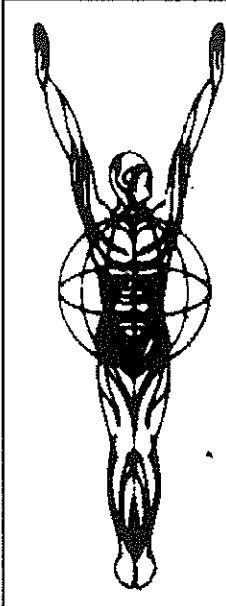
nervous system (Ornstein & Sobel, 1989, p. 69).

The healing power of creativity was highly regarded by Carl Jung. It stimulates the intuitive, "feminine" or "yin" side of the psyche, and is an outlet for the unconscious (Menninger, 1938, p. 385). Creative sublimations afforded by art, crafts, music, dance, and hobbies gratify the pleasure principle (Lancer, 2003), and are relaxing and powerful channels for Eros. Whether it's creativity, knitting, cooking, or sports, people are happiest when they are in "flow," losing themselves in an activity. According to researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, "flow" generates a sense of well being—that life is good (Justice, 2000, p. 134).

An instructor at a stroke rehabilitation facility told me stories about two stroke patients, one formerly a professional dancer who walked with a quad cane; when her favorite music was played, she was able to dance with grace. Another was a biology professor and gourmet cook, whose love of nature and teaching aroused Eros. For years after his stroke, he couldn't speak. However, one day, while sitting by the window, he saw a clump of mushrooms, and began talking fluently about the species and how to prepare them. When his caretakers noticed and commented, he stopped abruptly (personal interview with Devon Wallace, July 5, 2005). For many years, although I couldn't walk without pain, I could still dance.

Most notable is the story of cellist Pablo Casals. He suffered from rheumatoid arthritis as well as emphysema. Each morning, with his head bent forward, he shuffled to the piano bench. He unclenched his hands, his back began to straighten, and his breathing relaxed. As reported by his guest, Norman Cousins, Casals began to play Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier* with skill and alacrity. He hummed as he played, and then began a Brahms concerto. His fingers became extremely agile as they flew across the keyboard. His whole body became fluid and moved with the music. He rose, now standing several inches taller, walked to breakfast, and after a hearty meal, went for a walk ([www.healingmusic.org/Main/Newsletter/Interface\\_Sound\\_Medicine.htm](http://www.healingmusic.org/Main/Newsletter/Interface_Sound_Medicine.htm)).

Creativity uplifts the soul, providing pleasure and inspiration, particularly if engaged in as play. From a biochemical standpoint, play heals by increasing our expressive range, loosening the flow of information that is stuck (Pert, 1997, p. 277). On the other hand, focusing on effort, technique, or an expected outcome restricts that flow, and takes us further from the awareness and joy of the moment (Lancer, 1991). During play, we are united in the timeless present with the object of our experience. A child's play is purposeless yet meaningful; it is not self-conscious. We all carry that latent memory of childhood pleasure and play—a time to which we yearn to return when we were at one



To locate a Hanna Somatic Educator® near you, please visit our new website at

\*

[www.hannasomatics.com](http://www.hannasomatics.com)

For further information, please contact:

**Association for Hanna Somatic Education®**, Inc.  
 925 Golden Gate Drive  
 Napa, California 94558-9601  
 (707) 255-1259

with the world, with love and pleasure. Like the Greeks, Freud equated love and pleasure, where the Self enjoys the world as it enjoys the Self (Brown, 1959, pp. 32-33, 38, 46). This love of life and blissful sense of oneness is what Eros represented in the Orphic mysteries.

"Self-love," says Bernie Siegel (1989, p. 249), "is an acknowledgement of the spark of the Divine that is in each of us, no matter what our imperfections"—the ultimate aim of Eros. ☸

## Notes

1. The religion was named for Orpheus, who unified the values of Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo was the god of order, harmony, and moderation, while Dionysus was the god of wild drunkenness, feasting, and ecstasy (Hamilton, 1954, p. 214).

2. Freud originally believed that man sought homeostasis to avoid pain, a concept referred to as the "Nirvana Principle," then later the "death wish."

3. "Information substances" was coined by Francis Schmitt in 1984, referring to all messenger molecules and receptors.

4. Freud thought Eros was the unifying force between cells that creates multicellular organisms.

## Bibliography

Aristotle. *Physiognomonica*.

Abraham, R. (1994). *Chaos, Gaia and Eros*. New York: Harper. Collins.

Applegate, K. L., Kiecolt-Glaser, J., & Glaser, R. (1997, June 5). Positive affect and immune function. *Research Perspectives in PsychoNeuroImmunology*.

Bach-y-Rita, E. (1981). New pathways in the recovery from brain injury. *Somatics*, III(3), 38-47.

Barnet, A., & Barnet, R. (1998). *The youngest minds*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Breakey, B. M. (2000). *Choose life*. Asher Press. 2000. See innerself.com/Miscellaneous/music.htm.

Benson, H. (2000). *The relaxation response*. New York: Harper-Collins Publishers.

Berkman, L. F., & Syme, S. L. (1979). Social networks, host resistance, and mortality. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 109, 186-204.

Brown, N. O. (1959). *Life against*

*death*. New York: Random House.

Buhl, H. (n.d.). *Autonomic nervous system and energetic medicine*.

Retrieved from orgone.org/articleslax2001buhl-a.htm.

Caprio, F. S., & Berger, L. R. (1964).

*Helping yourself with self-hypnosis*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. Inc.

Check, W. A. (1990). *The mind-body connection*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.

Dossey, L. (2001). *Healing beyond the body*. Boston: Shambala Publications. Inc.

Dossey, L. (1993). *Healing words: The power of prayer and the practice of medicine*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Emoto, M. (2004). *Messages from water*. Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing.

Freud, S. (1961). *Beyond the pleasure principle*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and its discontents*. London: Hogarth Press.

Futterman, A. D., Kemeng, M. E., Shapiro, D., & Fahey, J. L. (1994). Immunological and physiological changes associated with induced positive and negative mood. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 45, 499-511.

Hamilton, E. (1954). *The Greek way*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Harrison, J. E. (1955). *Prologomena to the study of Greek religion*. New York: Meridian.

The Healing Music Organization. (n.d.). Retrieved from www.healing-music.org/Main/Newsletter\_Interface\_Sound\_Medicine.htm.

Janov, A. (2000). *The biology of love*. New York: Prometheus Books.

Justice, B. (2000). *Who gets sick?* Houston, TX: Peak Press.

Lancer, D. (2003, February). Interrupting the cycle of chronic pain. *Many Voices*, 12-13.

Lancer, D. (1991, October). Body and soul—Sex and spirituality. *Whole Life Times*, 17.

Marshall, H. R. (1894). *Pain, pleasure and aesthetics*. New York: MacMillan & Co.

Menninger, K. (1938). *Man against himself*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Motz, J. (1993). "Everyone an energy healer: The Treat V Conference" in Santa Fe, N.M. *Advances*, 9, 1993.

Ornstein, R., & Sobel, D. (1989). *Healthy pleasures*. Woburn, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.



Darlene Lancer, M.A., M.F.T.

Pierrakos, J. C. (2001). *Eros, love & sexuality*. Mendocino, CA: LifeRhythm.

Pelletier, K. (1977). *Mind as healer, mind as slayer*. New York: Dell Publishing.

Pert, C. B. (1997). *Molecules of emotion*. New York: Scribner.

Polonsky, W. H., Knapp, P. H., Levy, E. M., & Black, P. H. (1988). Experimentally induced emotion and immunologic change: Pilot findings (abstract). *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 198.

Reich, W. (1972). *Character analysis*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd.

Rein, G., & McCraty, R. (1993). Paper presented at the Joint USPA/IAPR Psychotronics Conference, Milwaukee, WI.

Rossi, E. (1986). *The psychobiology of mind-body healing*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Rossi, E. (2002). *The psychobiology of gene expression*. New York: W. W. Norton Professional Books.

Sharaf, M. R. (1983). *Fury on earth: Biography of Wilhelm Reich*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Siegel, B. (1989). *Peace, love and healing*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.