

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

---



# Why People Don't Heal and How They Can

Caroline Myss

## About the Book

Why do some people heal, while others do not? For more than fifteen years, Caroline Myss has studied this question, working with hundreds of people and motivating them to examine their souls and change their lives. Now, in *Why People Don't Heal and How They Can*, Dr Myss builds on her earlier teaching to reveal the cultural and individual contexts in which people become physically and spiritually ill. With her practical approach to healing, readers will learn to overcome the mental and emotional blocks to becoming well. Fascinating, illuminating and utterly compelling, *Why People Don't Heal and How They Can ...*

- \* *Brings together Dr Myss's breakthrough views on energy medicine and the development of human consciousness and spirituality over the ages.*
- \* *Teaches you how to perceive the seven different energy centres of the body and interpret the spiritual challenges they present.*
- \* *Provides healing rituals and prayers that will help you to get and stay on the path to wellness.*

Through her characteristic no-nonsense style and high-voltage storytelling, Caroline Myss provides non-stop insights and practical advice that will enable you to disconnect from a culture of wounds and reconnect with an inner and outer spiritual energy and purpose.

# Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Introduction: What Is Energy Medicine?

PART ONE: WHY PEOPLE DON'T HEAL ...

*Chapter 1: Woundology and the Healing Fire*

*Chapter 2: The Five Myths About Healing*

*Chapter 3: The Chakras, the Astrological Ages, and the  
Forms of Power*

*Chapter 4: Beginning the Journey to Individual and  
Symbolic Power*

PART TWO: ... AND HOW THEY CAN

*Chapter 5: Finding the Right Path Through the Chaos of  
Healing*

*Chapter 6: Igniting the Healing Fire Within*

*Chapter 7: Visualizing the Chakras*

*Chapter 8: Using the Chakras and the Sacraments for  
Healing*

*Epilogue: Snow White and the Seven Chakras*

Acknowledgements

Index

About the Author

Also by Caroline Myss

Copyright

# Why People Don't Heal And How They Can

Caroline Myss, Ph.D.

*This book is dedicated to  
Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.,  
and Daniel Lowenstein, M.D.—  
with great love and appreciation  
for having come into my life.*

## *Introduction: What Is Energy Medicine?*

My intention in writing this book is to offer readers a new perspective on health, specifically on why we don't heal and how we can. I may seem to be entering the subject of healing through the back door, since I am giving so much attention to why we fail to heal, but I believe that many of us are almost as afraid of healing as we are of illness. By understanding how fear and other negative emotions adversely affect healing, you may more easily identify how you are interfering, consciously or unconsciously, with your own healing process.

It has become apparent to me that assuming that everyone wants to heal is both misleading and potentially dangerous. Illness can, for instance, become a powerful way to get attention you might not otherwise receive—as a form of leverage, illness can seem almost attractive. Illness may also convey the message that you have to change your life quite drastically. Because change is among the most frightening aspects of life, you may fear change more intensely than illness and enter into a pattern of postponing the changes you need to make.

A central misconception of today's holistic culture is the belief that all illness results from personal negativity, either from tragic past experiences, from negative attitudes that contaminate our minds and bodies, or from bad past-life karma. Yet negativity is not the only source of illness: It can also emerge as the answer to a prayer. It can physically guide us onto a path of insight and learning upon which we would otherwise never have set foot. It may be a catalyst

for expanding personal consciousness as well as for understanding the greater meaning of life.

As terrifying as disease is, it is also an invitation to enter into the nature of mystery. Our lives are made up of a series of mysteries that we are meant to explore but that are meant to remain unsolved. We are meant to live with the questions we have about our lives, even use them as companions, and allow them to lead us into the deepest recesses of our nature, wherein we discover the Sacred. I hope that this book will help you find new ways of framing the meaning of illness and other life challenges and help you move deeper into your mysteries and further along your personal path toward spiritual mastery.

While illness can help you find your essential sacredness, your oneness with God, humanity, and all living creatures, you don't have to become ill in order to begin to understand your spirit and heal your life. I find that people begin to see and understand themselves as sacred through learning about what I call energy medicine. According to energy medicine, the human spirit is a manifestation of energy. We all have seven energy centers in our bodies, which in the Hindu system are called chakras. Each chakra roughly corresponds to a location in the physical body. I like to think of the chakras as "energetic" computer disks or data banks that collect information of all sorts. In my work I have discovered that these seven energy centers correspond to the various life issues and challenges with which the seven sacraments of Christianity and the ten sefirot of the Tree of Life in the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition are also meant to help us.

Our spirit grows into maturity and increasing self-understanding through seven stages of spiritual development. As we progress through these stages, we gain different kinds of personal power. The chakras—and their counterparts in the sacraments and the Tree of Life—mark an inner path of spiritual evolution. They form the steps on



an unfolding of our personal path toward awakening a higher consciousness. Learning the language of the chakras and nurturing these spiritual qualities can simultaneously strengthen our physical bodies and help us heal illness or maintain health.

A man named Ben, who came to one of my workshops while dealing with prostate cancer, responded instantly when I explained the correspondences between the chakras, the sacraments, and the Tree of Life. For him, they formed a new language of healing. Ben went on to use the imagery from the workshop, which I also teach in this book, continually in his own healing. Whenever he visited his doctor for treatment, he said a prayer or mantra beforehand in which he invoked the power of the chakras, sacraments, and Tree of Life to “activate” his body. Within six months his cancer went into remission.

As a medical intuitive, I describe for people the nature of their physical diseases as well as the energetic dysfunctions that are present within their bodies. I read the energy field that permeates and surrounds the body, picking up information about dramatic childhood experiences, behavior patterns, even superstitious beliefs, all of which have bearing on the person’s physical health. Based on the information I perceive intuitively in their energy fields, including the chakras, I can make recommendations for treating their condition on both a physical and spiritual level.

The intention behind using energy medicine is to treat the body and the spirit equally. As you learn the language of the chakras, you will come to recognize the emotional, psychological, and spiritual stress factors that affect your health and that correspond to your physical symptoms. Your health is also affected by your self-esteem and relationship history, your response to profound or traumatic experiences or memories, and your energy management in everyday situations.

Energy medicine is actually quite an old field of knowledge; its principles and techniques were certainly known to the ancient Hindu, Chinese, and shamanic healers. What I believe is new is my correlation of Eastern spiritual ideas of the chakras with Western spiritual truths and ethics to create a new language of energy. The word *energy* has taken on a number of meanings recently, but I use it to refer to both physical and spiritual energy. Eastern metaphysics and Western Theosophy have variously described a series of energetic sheaths or layers surrounding and interacting with the physical body. When mystics tell us that we are much vaster than we know, part of what they are talking about is this energy field. Everyone has such an energy field, and it contains valuable information about their physical, psychological, and spiritual condition and needs.

As an intuitive, I can read this field and see an actual connection between, say, the loss of energy in the pancreas and the creation of diabetes or hypoglycemia. I can also track that development to specific issues in a person's life—for example, to the stress resulting from too much responsibility or the fear of it. And by learning the language of the chakras, you too can, I believe, become more adept at seeing physical and spiritual energy connections and using this perception to prevent or heal illness by making certain life changes.

You can also learn to use Symbolic sight, to intuitively interpret the power symbols in your life, to reveal where you have invested your personal energy, to uncover the greater meaning of your life's challenges apart from the literal events, and to discover how this all connects to your health.

This book gives a short course in the language of the chakras, shorter than in my previous book, *Anatomy of the Spirit*, so that you will have an easy reference to the language of energy to begin your own course of healing. If you have read *Anatomy of the Spirit* or *The Creation of Health*, you can use the review of the chakras as a refresher.

The chakras are vertically aligned from the base of the spine to the crown of the head, suggesting that we ascend toward the Divine by gradually mastering the seductive pull of the material world. At each stage we gain a more refined understanding of personal and spiritual power, since each chakra represents a spiritual life-lesson or challenge common to all human beings. Although the chakra system was developed in the East and served as the basis for certain Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist teachings, the kinds of energy they describe are congruent with the energy defined by the sefirot of the Kabbalah and are meant to be managed by the Christian sacraments.

I review the language of the chakras both at the beginning of the book and more extensively at the end. I include ways to use their energy for healing, and techniques for developing Symbolic sight, and I also present a larger symbolic context for healing. Although I have not written about this concept before, I have been using it in my workshops for some time now. Simply put, I see the history of our spiritual development as a succession of power (or energy) cultures that roughly correspond to several astrological ages. An astrological age lasts about two thousand years, during which time human consciousness develops in new ways. During each of these ages, a certain kind of energy was dominant, and it affected people's lives, health, and spiritual outlook. Each age has contributed to human knowledge distinct perceptions about the nature of reality and the power of the human spirit—perceptions that still affect our health and souls today. To help understand the kind of power or energy most characteristic of these ages, I enlist the symbolism of astrology.

The age of Aries ran from around 2,000 B.C. to the birth of Christ, which introduced the Piscean age. And as anyone familiar with the musical *Hair!* already knows, we are now entering the age of Aquarius. Aries, a fire sign, represents

the fire of ignition, of initial creation, of the beginning of the zodiac itself and, as I see it, a revving up of many cultures and civilizations. A unity of Tribal culture, thought, and law began in the Arien age, which superseded the more primitive Tribalism of the preceding age of Taurus. Aries was an era of dominating the physical environment, of laws from Hammurabi to Moses, of laying the social and cultural foundations on which we based the emotional, psychological, and spiritual development of the next era.

The Piscean age was a time of dualism, when human consciousness divided in a powerful way into polarities, such as those between Western and Eastern culture, church and state, body and spirit (in a split epitomized by Manicheanism), the science of magnetics, even political polarities of left and right. At the same time, we broke away from the Tribal mind to develop a clearer sense of self: the Renaissance celebrated the individual, artists and composers began to sign their work, and people began keeping diaries. The concept of law evolved from tribal codes to the rights of the individual as embodied in the Magna Carta, the U.S. Constitution, and more recent laws aimed at loosening social and religious restrictions.

As we enter the age of Aquarius at the end of the twentieth century, we are moving from astrological eras represented by fish and animals into one symbolized by a human being: the water-bearer. If division was the theme of Pisces, wholeness is the theme of Aquarius, in which we are striving to discover a spiritual unity. The religions of the world have begun to try to accommodate each other in unprecedented ways, and we appear to have developed a global marketplace, global technology, and global awareness of social justice and the need for environmental preservation despite obvious breaches of both. The chant first voiced at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, "The whole world is watching!" has become as prophetic as Marshall McLuhan's description of the emerging world

culture as a “global village.” This new kind of worldwide tribal unity will replace the much more limited tribalism of the Arien age.

With each astrological age, spiritual consciousness has matured to include a greater awareness of ourselves, of the spirit inherent in other life, and of the greater power around us. We need to examine the role that each of these eras has played so we can understand how we have absorbed their attitudes and beliefs and how and where they are hampering our efforts to heal ourselves individually, physically, and spiritually. As the astrological ages progressed, they encompassed a succession of different mindsets and different kinds of physical and spiritual power. I have labeled these attitudes and powers Tribal, Individual, and Symbolic. Understanding the characteristics of power inherent in each astrological age transfers to the ability to recognize that we have multiple capacities for perception; Tribal sight is fine sensory; Individual sight extends into emotional and psychological interpretation, which adds relativity to perception; and Symbolic sight reaches into the impersonal realm of archetypal sight. Tribal power, characteristic of the age of Aries, is essentially group consciousness, identified most strongly to membership in a family, ethnic group, religion, and nation. The strengths of Tribal power—security, order, loyalty, a sense of identity—can easily become its weaknesses—rigidity, conformity, patriarchalism, xenophobia. Tribal consciousness focuses on externals to the exclusion of many internal individual and spiritual needs, and thus is essentially a fine sensory perceptual system.

Individual power, by contrast, is related to our emotional and psychological identity epitomized by the Piscean age, during which science and the arts flourished and the value of individual genius ascended. The weaknesses of Individual power are excessive focus on the self, narcissism, and the tendency to polarize good and evil, male and female, East

and West, knowledge and intuition, left brain and right brain.

Finally, Symbolic power is that which allows us to see things in impersonal terms, to view both history and our own lives with the overarching, unifying vision characteristic of the Aquarian age, which is calling on us to discover the inner power of consciousness. The energy of this emergent astrological age pulls us to create a culture in which spirit and energy have a higher priority than matter and the body, and to understand that the energy within our minds, bodies, and spirits is the same as that of God or the greater divinity. As we enter the Aquarian age, however, we remain connected to the evolutionary energy contained in each previous age.

The ability to think of power and energy in these three ways helps us gain an entirely new perception of our individual life choices, how they affect our spirit and health, and how we can help ourselves recover our health and call back our spirits.

In the grand scope and clash of human history can be seen a reflection of our own spiritual development and our own need to adapt to change. Difficulties and illness are a necessary part of our spiritual evolution. Just as we look back at world history and create meaning from seemingly unconnected events, so can we create meaning out of disruptions and challenges in our daily lives.

My intention, and my hope, is that the blending of all this information will provide readers with a means through which they can enter illness without fear and face change with courage. I hope that this book will provide you with some new and beneficial methods of seeing yourself, your health challenge, and your healing potential. I particularly want you to re-envision yourself in the context of today's culture, so that you can develop a way of seeing yourself Symbolically. By so doing, I believe, you can ignite the healing fire that lies in wait deep within the human spirit,

which will guide you to the right healing steps for you to take.

The healing fire that has gripped us as individuals is also at work everywhere on the planet, human beings are being compelled by a force much greater than ourselves to heal ourselves, our cultures, our environment—in short, to become a conscious species. This is the reason so many of us desire to be healthy and conscious—and are tormented by our inability to fully reach that goal. Perhaps by understanding the dynamics of this new culture of which we are now a part, we will be more able to become healthy human beings and so begin to fulfill our destiny.

As I have taught people who were trying to heal the Symbolic language of the chakras, sacraments, Tree of Life, and the cultural context to personal healing, I have seen it reinforce a belief in Divine guidance. Developing a fluency in these metaphysical symbols seems to help them make contact with the healing energy inherent in their own spirit.

I met Ellie four years ago in a workshop in Europe, at a time when I was already deeply absorbed by the similarities among the sacraments, the Tree of Life, and the chakra system. I had no idea that Ellie would be the first person with whom I would share this information. In a private conversation, she told me that she had a history of repeated experiences with cancer, beginning eight years before. Her first tumor had shown up in her left leg. It was a small malignant tumor, but following her surgery to have it removed, she was told that it was contained and that all looked well. About four years later she discovered another tumor growing in her arm. After surgery she was told that this one, like the previous one, seemed to be contained, except that her physician now advised her to keep a close watch over her body. At the time of our meeting, Ellie was dealing with her third tumor, which had shown up once again in her leg, three years after her second one. She knew that this one was also malignant, and she was now in a

state of total terror that no matter what she did, she could not break her pattern of repeatedly producing malignant tumors. Furthermore, she had become obsessed with fear that every pain she experienced in her body, no matter where it might be, was an indication that another tumor was growing.

Ellie was deeply perplexed, because she knew that she was doing all the right things to keep her body clean. If diet, exercise, therapy, yoga, and holistic treatments of every variety were not working, what else was there for her to do? Was there a God who truly listened, and if so, where was this God in her life?

There have been several times in my work when I have felt myself at a loss for the right words, and this was one of them. For lack of anything else to say, I shared with Ellie that I had often asked the same questions and had never had the answer come in a way I had anticipated. I told her that as I worked with clients, using the chakra system as my only reference point, I frequently felt that the model, while ancient and sacred, was incomplete. Then one day, as I was teaching a group of students, I looked at the model of seven circles that I had drawn on the board, and instead of seeing the chakra system, I found myself thinking about the seven Christian sacraments. Shortly afterward I had a similar intuition about the Tree of Life as described in the Jewish Kabbalah. I was struck with the wonderment over the union of these three sacred traditions and the realization that the voice of the Divine was showing me the holy passage of sacred energy through the human body.

I described for Ellie the union of these three spiritual traditions and added that their merger needed to be viewed through a Symbolic lens to tap into their power. I asked her to interpret Baptism, the first sacrament, as representing her ability to see her entire life and all the people in it, along with her relationship with this earth itself, as a gift that she has been asked to accept. I suggested that she add to that



not only the meaning of Shekhinah, representing a union with the community of humanity, but also the energy of Gaia—the life-force of Nature itself. As I spoke to Ellie, she closed her eyes, and I could sense her intently following my words. I told her to feel this connection to the earth and to her life and to direct it into her first chakra, with the image that she was reconnecting fully to the system of life.

I continued this description through the remaining chakras, and by the time I had finished, Ellie appeared to be in a deep state of meditation. She emerged about half an hour later and spoke calmly. “I didn’t realize that the consequence of my bouts with cancer was destroying more than my body,” she said. “I didn’t realize that I had completely lost touch with the energy of life itself, and that no amount of nutrition can replace that. I need to heal my connection to life and not just focus on healing cancer.”

Ellie repeated that visualization constantly. She stayed in touch with me, and with each phone call she reported feeling her physical system returning to life. She said that she had created a structure to her visualizations in which she worked to incorporate the meaning of the lessons inherent in each chakra, sacrament, and sefira of the Tree of Life. She decided to postpone her surgery for a while because she wanted to see if her internal work could actually produce a change in her physical body. If it could, then she would know that she had finally broken her cycle of cancer.

Within a month, her tumor began to show signs of shrinking, which was the signal Ellie had been waiting for. She had it surgically removed, believing to the depths of her soul that she would never again have a recurrence of cancer.

Although Ellie’s is a particularly dramatic healing of a physical disease, keep in mind that healings can occur for many different kinds of ailments and can also be emotional and spiritual as well as physical. The stories you will read in

this book range from the everyday to the extraordinary with many gradations in between, and you are likely to see your own health challenge or life crisis reflected in one or more of them. I want you to feel confident that there is something here that will facilitate your healing.

One of the main beliefs that I want you to adopt in order to heal your life or illness is a belief in the importance of forgiveness. Forgiveness frees up the energy necessary for healing. I will present suggestions on how to go about forgiving—or letting go of—the past, and will give you new rituals and invocations for helping you see your present life Symbolically, bolster your personal energy, connect you with Divine energy, and help you heal.

Although the first half of this book treats in depth the reasons why people don't heal, the second half will show you in detail how you can. We'll begin by discussing what I consider to be the greatest stumbling block to healing in our culture today.

*Part One*

WHY PEOPLE DON'T HEAL . . .

## *Chapter One*

### WOUNDOLOGY AND THE HEALING FIRE

IN THE LATE spring of 1988, I arrived at the Findhorn Community in northeastern Scotland to teach a healing workshop. At that point in my career the people who came to my workshops had tended to be searching for a personal healing. They expected me, as a medical intuitive, to facilitate their healing directly by giving them an individual reading and setting up a treatment regimen for them. (These days my workshops are largely filled with self-reliant people who want to learn how to become more intuitive by learning to “speak chakras” and so heal themselves and their lives, or professionals looking to learn how to help others heal.)

Though I myself am not a healer, I was happy to help them, of course, to the best of my abilities. Often in my readings I was simply validating the suspicions, insights, or intuitions that they already had about themselves and the changes they needed to make in their lives. Sometimes these readings ignited an inner physical and spiritual healing process. Even so, at that time, my workshop participants and I all felt that we were on the right track. After all, healing and health had become the main focus of the holistic or consciousness culture as well as the center of my life. Almost everyone I met, professionally and personally, spoke about either wanting to become a healer or needing a healer, being on their way to visit a new

healer, or believing that they were meant to be a healer as soon as they had completed their own healing.

I enjoyed traveling around the world and meeting spiritually committed people who needed me as much as I needed them, and I had especially come to love Findhorn, a community of about three hundred people sharing an organic, cooperative life and a respect for all spiritual paths. Some of the community members reside in an enchanting, converted turn-of-the-century hotel; others have made their home quarters in a beautiful park area alongside the Findhorn Bay. The rugged beauty of the Scottish Highlands, combined with the spiritual focus of the community, make Findhorn a most attractive place to be. Whenever I go there, I seem to receive a special energetic charge that results in some important insight, and this visit in 1988 was no exception. This time, however, the insight came in a rather unlikely way.

Prior to beginning the weeklong workshop, I had arranged to have lunch with my dear friend Mary. Having arrived early in the dining room, I joined two gentlemen for tea. Mary entered a while later, and when she walked over to our table, I introduced her to my companions. She had just extended her hand to greet them when another member of the Findhorn community, Wayne, came up to her and asked, "Mary, are you busy on June eighth? We're looking for someone to escort a guest coming to Findhorn for the day."

The tone of Mary's response was as revealing as its length. She snapped, "June eighth? Did you say June eighth?" Suffused with anger and resentment, she continued, "Absolutely not! June eighth is my incest support group meeting, and I would never, ever miss that meeting! We count on each other, after all. We incest victims have to be there for one another. I mean, who else do we have?"

Mary went on for a while longer, but this is as much as I can accurately remember. I was captivated by the instantaneous dramatics triggered by a simple question

about her schedule. Wayne hardly took notice of her response, thanked her, and left, but I was astonished. Later, as Mary and I were having lunch, I asked her about her behavior:

“Mary, why, when you were answering Wayne’s question about your schedule, did you have to let all three men know that you had suffered incest as a young girl, that you were still angry about it, that you were angry with men in general, and that you intended to control the atmosphere of the conversation with your anger? All Wayne asked you was, ‘Are you busy June eighth?’ and in response you gave these three men a miniature therapy class. A simple yes or no would have done fine.”

Mary looked at me as if I had betrayed her. Her body stiffened, and she emphasized her words in an ice-cold, defensive tone: “I answered that way because I am a victim of incest.” She drew back from the table, stopped eating, and threw her napkin over her plate, indicating that our lunch together had come to a close. Although I didn’t realize it at that moment, so had our friendship.

“Mary, honey,” I replied, softening my own tone somewhat, “I know you’re a victim of incest, but what I’m trying to figure out is why you found it necessary to tell two strangers and Wayne your history when all he wanted to know was whether you could help out on June eighth. Did you want these men to treat you a certain way or talk to you in a certain way? What made you lay your wounds out on the table within seven seconds of meeting two new people?”

Mary told me that I simply did not understand because I had not endured what she and numerous other incest victims had gone through, but that she had expected me as a friend to be more compassionate. I replied that lack of compassion had nothing to do with what I was asking her. I could feel the separation of energy between us as I realized that in order for our friendship to continue, I needed to

“speak wounds” to Mary, to follow some very specific rules of how a supportive friend was to behave, and to bear always in mind that she defined herself by a negative experience.

In addition to her painful childhood history, Mary also had a history of chronic ailments. She was always in pain—some days emotional, some days physical. Though she was kind and always ready to support her friends, she much preferred the company of people who had also had abusive childhoods. That day at our lunch, I realized that Mary needed to be with people who spoke the same language and shared the same mindset and behaviors. I immediately began to think of this attitude as “woundology.” I have since become convinced that when we define ourselves by our wounds, we burden and lose our physical and spiritual energy and open ourselves to the risk of illness.

That day I felt as if I had been catapulted out of the surrounding healing culture of Findhorn and the general consciousness movement and was viewing it as an outsider. Although I had not previously noticed this pattern of thought and behavior in Mary or in anyone else, the very next day, curiously, a miniature version of the Mary incident took place in my workshop.

I had arrived twenty minutes early to get ready for my presentation and noticed a woman sitting alone. I sat down next to her and asked, “What’s your name?” That’s all I asked. Yet without even looking at me, she responded:

“I’m a victim of incest, but I’m fifty-six years old now and I’m over that trauma. I have a wonderful support group, and several of us get together at least once a week, which I believe is essential to healing.”

She still had not told me her name, so I asked again, “And what’s your name?” But she still didn’t answer me directly. She seemed to be in a daze. It felt to me as if she had been preparing for a long time to say something publicly, and now, given the opportunity, she couldn’t hear any questions

that didn't relate to her agenda. Instead of telling me her name, she said how much she enjoyed coming to workshops like mine because a person was free to speak openly about his or her past, and she hoped that I would allow time for people to share their personal histories. I thanked her and left the room, needing a few moments to gather my thoughts.

Meeting this woman the day after the incident with Mary was not a coincidence. I believe I was being directed to pay attention to the ways we expect to heal our lives—through therapy and support groups. So many people in the midst of a “process” of healing, I saw, are at the same time feeling stuck. They are striving to confront their wounds, valiantly working to bring meaning to terrible past experiences and traumas, and exercising compassionate understanding of others who share their wounds. But they are not healing. They have redefined their lives around their wounds and the process of accepting them. They are not working to get beyond their wounds. In fact, they are stuck in their wounds. Now primed to hear people speak woundology, I believe I was meant to challenge the assumptions that I and many others then held dear—especially the assumption that everyone who is wounded or ill wants the full recovery of their health.

I felt as if I had been given a pair of magical glasses with which to see beneath the behavior of my workshop students. I soon found that the language of woundology was also spoken outside Findhorn. People around the world are confusing the therapeutic value of self-expression with permission to manipulate others with their wounds. Instead of viewing the uncovering of their wounds as an early stage of the healing process, they are using their wounds as a flag and their groups as families and nations.

How did we come to such a pass? A little more than a generation ago, our society was one in which people had difficulty expressing even their most innocent psychological



and emotional needs. Today people wear their deepest wounds on their sleeve like a red badge of courage. How did we get to this point? To explain, I have to go back a little further into the past.

## OPENING UP

I had begun my work as a medical intuitive in 1983, when I became able to sense illness in other people. At that time I had lacked any training as a health professional, but I had co-founded a publishing company that was dedicated to producing books about consciousness, health, and alternative or complementary medicine. The company published first-person accounts of healings as well as books by more scientifically oriented authors reporting research and discoveries in medical treatments then considered alternative. Those years as both a publisher and a medical intuitive educated me in such complementary ways that I now feel that this personal edification must have been directed by a higher force.

The countless manuscripts we received containing personal stories revealed the depth of fear people feel when facing a terminal illness. But many of the stories also revealed the power of the human spirit to catalyze a healing process that can reclaim the life-force, give meaning to illness, and heal seemingly chronic or terminal diseases. Occasionally I would come across a manuscript by a patient who had lost the battle for physical life but had won an inner tranquillity—a sense of completion of this life and an acceptance of the next stage: the death of the body.

Our culture in the early 1980s was hungry for healing and searching for the experience or state of mind that would ignite a healing fire. When I started to do workshops in 1984, the alternative healing field had established a new vocabulary for psychological and emotional healing. People

spoke openly about their physical, mental, and spiritual health. Sharing the details of one's personal history became commonplace, as childhood experiences of incest, molestation, and abuse were openly discussed. The social boundaries that had previously limited acceptable social exchanges had dissolved into a new form of instant intimacy.

This new kind of intimacy grew out of the therapeutic culture of the 1960s. Prior to the 1960s, family secrets, financial information, political affiliations, occupational difficulties, and rumors about who was having an affair with whom were all considered "intimate" information, shared only with family members and very close friends. Even asking someone which presidential candidate he had voted for qualified as a highly intimate question. Nor were such topics discussed easily even among trusted, long-standing intimates: Before the 1960s we lacked the vocabulary for sharing with others the most intimate contents of our emotional lives. Personal emotional needs had not yet been introduced into our general culture. We had not yet become comfortable expressing inner psychological experiences, and our basic physical and emotional needs were generally considered to be met if we took care of our job and family responsibilities.

Moreover, before the 1960s society in general viewed those who sought the help of a psychiatrist as mentally ill. Even in 1972, the revelation that a vice-presidential candidate—George McGovern's running mate, Thomas Eagleton—had undergone psychotherapy was reason enough to have him removed from the ticket. The notion of working through a trauma therapeutically was still unfamiliar, so people viewed any and all mental stress as mental illness. They were afraid of the deeper recesses of the mind and the heart, and few explored them willingly. Those who did acquired reputations as rebels, eccentrics, mystics, hermits, or social outcasts. Most people did not

tamper with their internal forces but lived safely within the assumption that if the external parts of their lives were stable, their minds and hearts would naturally attain a degree of contentment.

The therapeutic age gave birth to an entirely new dimension of thought: It opened up the inner world behind our eyes. With each step inward that we took, new perceptions about ourselves emerged and overran the long-guarded boundaries around our emotions and psyches. The concept that “we create our own reality” seemed to spring into popular usage almost out of nowhere. The electric idea that we have a kind of ultimate, personal spiritual power took hold of the popular imagination, and *self-responsibility* became a new power word. We applied these beliefs to every aspect of our lives. Most especially, we began to apply them to the healing process.

People became remarkably eager to “stand and proclaim” not only that they were ill but that they were responsible for their illness, as if this act of public purging in itself contained some kind of power that would guarantee a safe passage into health. In my own workshops and in others I attended, one person after another would describe a particular illness and then add, “I know I’m responsible for this.” Where speaking about emotions publicly had once been taboo, it was now a requirement for healing.

Fueled by the notion that an emotional wound that they had previously experienced was at the root of their physical illness, people plunged into their inner lives determined to exorcise every negative memory, thought, and attitude. If they could only unlock that deeply secret emotional impulse, or release that negative childhood experience, they believed, their biological system would respond and reward them with complete health. Almost everyone I encountered during those years was convinced that complete recovery of health was just one psychological insight away. Amazingly enough, every workshop participant who went through this

spontaneous public ritual of confession sparkled with enthusiasm and hope. Sometimes, if their story was exceedingly dramatic, applause would follow the confession.

I too believed, as the other workshop participants did, that the psyche held the key to physical healing. An inner power, I was convinced, contained the fuel we needed to reorder our biochemistry and rebuild our bodies. Occasionally someone who had managed to heal an illness—who had not just put the illness into remission but had actually achieved a complete healing—would attain a near-celebrity status at workshops. During the breaks everyone would gather around the self-healer and ask, “What did you do to heal yourself?” I listened, too, eager to learn of some extraordinary treatment, nutritional program, or psychotherapy that would assure a cure.

The self-healers would credit a vast array of factors, including changes in nutrition, vitamin therapy, mud baths, hypnosis, past-life recall, exercise, bodywork, and colon cleansing. Most often, however, they detailed treatments that helped body, mind, and soul together. Regardless of the treatment or the nutritional program that they described, however, the self-healers’ greatest gift was the hope they brought to the rest of the group. Those who had made it back to health were considered living proof that individual efforts at self-discovery and healing—that attending workshops, reading books, and learning to express oneself—were bound to pay off.

## THE TURNING POINT

For reasons I may never understand, 1988 was the year when views and beliefs about healing shifted, at least within the network in which I was teaching. By this time, I was giving workshops in several different countries, yet that year I encountered the same reaction around the world:

Workshop participants were no longer interested solely in how to heal. They wanted to know why they were not healing. They had tried the many healing alternatives available, but they still were not healing. Their focus had shifted from enthusiasm about their individual quest for the right regimen, for the unique combination of mind-body treatments, to a terrible frustration and a ceaseless asking of “What’s going on here? Why isn’t anything working?”

The desperation they felt was phenomenal. I cannot even begin to recall the number of times I was asked, “Do you think I’m being punished for something?” At that time I had no adequate answer, only the old favorite: “Hold on to your faith, and keep focused on your healing. You can’t afford to become negative.” This was probably as helpful as saying, “Don’t think about a blue monkey.” It might even have added to the person’s guilt about his or her illness.

To be sure, faith and optimism are important factors in healing any life crisis, including illness, then and now. Back in 1988, however, I could see that people were retreating from the hopefulness of holistic health and self-responsibility and returning to the superstitions of what I call the Tribal mind. They suspected that they were being punished for something awful they had done; they saw the disease or suffering as a judgment of the heavens upon them. Privately, I was becoming as mystified as they were. As I watched them struggle so valiantly with their healing, I too began to wonder if maybe they were doing something wrong, or if maybe they weren’t supposed to heal, or if maybe the right treatment hadn’t yet been discovered. . . .

## THE SEDUCTIVE POWER OF WOUNDS

Then came my fateful luncheon meeting with Mary at Findhorn, followed by my encounter with the incest survivor in my healing workshop, and I began to get an inkling of

where the problem lay. For the next few years, woundology became my primary focus. I learned to listen between the lines of what my workshop participants were saying. I began to discern when a person was genuinely going through the specific stage of healing that requires a witness and when someone had discovered the “street” value or social currency of their wound—that is, the manipulative value of the wound.

“Whenever you learn a new word, you should listen carefully,” my favorite aunt had taught me as a child, “because you’ll hear everyone using it.” She was right, and once I tuned in to woundology, the majority of the people in my workshops were conversing in this new language, openly sharing their personal histories with other workshop participants. At times, their sharing even took on a competitive feeling in which one person seemed to attempt to eclipse the painful experiences of another.

The sharing of wounds had become the new language of intimacy, a shortcut to developing trust and understanding. The exchange of intimate revelations, which had been originally developed and intended as appropriate dialogue between therapists and patients, had become the bonding ritual for people just getting to know one another. I met one woman, for instance, who stated upon our introduction that the “rules” of being a friend to her began with agreeing to “honor her wounds.” When I asked her to tell me what that meant in practical terms, she said that she was only now beginning to process all of the violations that had happened to her as a child and that in the course of healing these wounds, she would frequently have mood swings and bouts of depression. “Honoring her wounds” meant respecting these moods, not challenging them. She claimed the right to set the tone of any social event of which she was a part. If she was in a “low space,” she expected her support system not to introduce humor into the atmosphere but to adjust their mood and conversation to hers. I asked her how long