



The Father of Healing Research

Bernard R. Grad, PhD

Reprint from forthcoming book: On the Road to Healing and Biogenesis

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I remember exactly where I was in 1970 when, as an undergraduate student in upstate New York, I first encountered the pioneering work of Bernard Grad. I had journeyed to Buffalo to hear some lectures on healing by the well-known parapsychologist Douglas Dean. I had already done a reasonable amount of reading on the subject of healing, at least in the popular literature. Most of it was disappointing, being either abstract discussions of human potential or series of anecdotes about supposed miraculous healings. Story after story, it left me – a natural skeptic – unsure about what to believe. I was intrigued by some of these anecdotes, but not persuaded.

Worse, at least to me, was that most of the anecdotes implied that “belief” was somehow central to healing. I was left with the nagging thought that perhaps healing was more of a psychological phenomenon than a natural biological process. The idea that healing efficacy required a psychological “buy-in” on the part of the person being treated left me uneasy. The logical inference of this way of thinking would be that unsuccessful healing must somehow be related to lack of faith. Blaming the victim wasn’t my thing.

So I wasn’t surprised that Professor Dean’s introduction to healing took off on the usual track, with entertaining stories about healers allegedly producing remarkable results with a variety of ailments. After

some minutes of this, I was about to drift off when Dean suddenly shifted to a slide of a plant-growth experiment with precisely measured comparisons of the effects of a healer’s intentions. Here was a straightforward presentation with healer X giving Y minutes of intention directed at plants, with results Z. These data compared growth rates of randomly selected plants and seeds to plants and seeds in a control group.

I sat straight up in amazement. Finally, real data! Presumably, I thought, the plants didn’t “believe” in healing (sometimes now I’m not so sure), yet here was an obvious and measurable effect. The statistics were straightforward, and the pictures spoke for themselves.

Slide after slide of data followed, some involving healthy plants and others involving plants that had been “shocked” by saline solution. Then, to my amazement, there followed some animal data. Experimental mice with skin wounds were treated for precise intervals by healers and compared to control mice with skin wounds which hadn’t been treated with healing. The surface areas of the wounds were precisely measured over time; the statistical and visual results were unquestionably favorable. Mice with induced goiters were randomly treated by healers and compared to those that were not treated. And so it went, on and on. My skeptical, non-believing-self became overwhelmed with the inevitable conclusion

of these astonishing data: healing is real!

As my mind reeled from the implications, I learned that the researcher was Dr. Bernard Grad, a biologist at McGill University in Montreal. Grad had performed experiments that would almost single-handedly change the way that we look at healing. Prior to Grad, the relevance and efficacy of whether or not a patient “believes” in healing was perhaps the biggest question about healing, when – if ever – it was discussed scientifically. After all, the pre-Grad era consisted mostly of collected cases and haphazard anecdotes. But what could be said in this regard about research in the post-Grad era? That’s easy: that the question of “belief” in healing has been completely transformed. While it was still reasonable to believe that faith or belief could still influence the efficacy of hands-on healing, the efficacy itself can no longer be claimed to be only attributable to a patient’s faith or lack of faith. Clearly there is a biological and energetic basis to healing. How healing works is still open to question and is being explored. Whether healing happens, in a post-Grad era... well, that’s a no-brainer. The door was flung open forever. An entire new field of healing research had been created.

My intellectual framework changed from this exposure to Grad’s work. He became for me (and still remains) simply “the Great Grad,” the scientist who changed the way we can know about how the world of healing works. Half a dozen years later, when I began my own healing experiments, they were modeled on the protocols of Bernard Grad. Decades later, I and many others are still following in his footsteps. I would take this further – I don’t know of a single line of healing research that can’t be traced back to Grad.

It would be a full thirty years after I came upon his work that I would finally have the opportunity to meet him in person. A mutual friend from the Society for Scientific Exploration arranged for me to see him in New York at the American Society of Psychical Research (ASPR), where Grad was on the board of trustees. With some trepidation—this was, after all, “the Great Grad”—I met him in the ASPR lobby. We

skipped the small talk and immediately adjourned to the library where we paced around a large table while rapidly exchanging ideas about healing. It turned out that we fundamentally disagreed on some points, and I found myself blurting out, “Grad, you just don’t understand anything about healing!” He stopped suddenly and burst out laughing at my sheer audacity. A friendship was born.

Bernie (he never wanted me to call him Dr. Grad) turned out to be a very special friend, as well as an invaluable colleague and mentor. In multiple experiments in different labs, I had been able to produce full cures of cancerous mice using skeptical volunteers. This intrigued Bernie to no end. Some of the patterns of remission were confusing, and both of us would literally work on possible explanations for years. Sometimes, when I finished an academic paper, I would drive to Montreal from Long Island just to show him a draft, knowing that his keen mind would find any weaknesses in either the data or the arguments. He was a relentless and wonderful taskmaster for precision.

Once when I was staying with Bernie and his wife Renee at their home in Montreal, I discovered by accident a huge trove of papers and data stored in various rooms. Since Bernie’s attention was always focused on whomever was visiting him rather than on himself, he had never brought up the research treasures that lay around from his many decades of work. With some prodding, he showed me the equivalent of ten four-drawer file cabinets worth of published and unpublished data.

To say that Bernie was prolific and relentlessly curious is to grossly underestimate matters. Let me give you just one example. On one of my visits, he showed me some “mummified” bananas that had been hardened after having been “treated” by a healer in the mid-1980s. They looked like shrunken and darkened versions of normal bananas, except that they were hardened like wood – hard enough, in fact, that they could be sawed. Grad found that these treated bananas never rotted.

I asked him if he had any experimental data on the phenomenon, and he showed me pounds and pounds (I weighed them!) of unpublished lab data where he had systematically exposed bananas to various healers over an extended period of time. He weighed them daily with great precision – to within a tenth of a gram – in order to track the mummification process. As I poured over these lab data for a few hours, I began to fully appreciate his masterful mind at work. It was a beautiful mind.

The catalogue of unpublished data that he never got a chance to write up far exceeds the normal output for any typical scientist for an entire career. Bernie wasn't typical, either professionally or personally. Professionally, he pioneered healing research despite incredible obstacles. Personally, he inspired so many to pursue their passions. And he did it all with deep humility, a twinkle in his eyes, and an infectious curiosity.

The forthcoming memoir contains only a fraction of his research. This is probably good, as a comprehensive recitation would only overwhelm most readers. Instead you will find the recollections of a true pioneer, one of the rare giants who opened up a new field of research. From our current vantage point in the 21st century, when there are now academic journals and societies devoted to healing research, it may seem incomprehensible that there was a time when just asking the questions that Bernie asked could mean professional ruin. You will come away with a feeling of awe and gratitude that Bernie Grad lived the life that he did. ☺



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Bernard Grad, Ph.D. was an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at McGill University in Montreal. During his thirty-six year tenure, he engaged in both conventional studies on aging and cancer, and also in studies of bioenergy. Dr. Grad is the author of more than 130 articles, many of which are about healing.