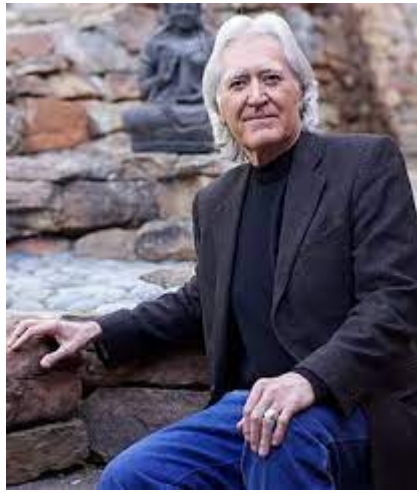


The Healing Power of Prayer: A Conversation with Larry Dossey

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The visionary ideas of award-winning author and physician Larry Dossey, MD, have helped shape integrative healthcare. In a conversation with KnowEwell, he explains the importance of prayer as a complement to medicine in the healing process.

Prayer has long been known to help in times of need. Studies have found that praying collectively has an even greater power to heal and that praying from a distance is just as effective as being in the same room as the person who needs healing. Scientific minds have researched the topic for centuries in efforts to understand how prayer affects healing, gathering evidence to discover how and why prayer works.



Larry Dossey, MD

One such medical professional, [Dr. Larry Dossey](#), has researched prayer and distance healing for the majority of his life. Integrating it into his own internal medical practice for over 30 years, Dossey says prayer has become a life-long passion. Dossey has authored many books on prayer and in one, *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer*, he delves into the subject at length.

“Whether you call it prayer, caring, or deep love, there’s some insight in certain areas of science that go beyond the religious connotations of prayer,” Dossey said. “It has to do with the concept that human consciousness is not isolated in our brain. It reaches out and we’re all part of a common consciousness. The concept of non-locality and modern physics comes as close as anything I’ve run across to explain how prayer works to heal.”

The general premise of the [power of prayer](#) is that space and time are flexible. There is a unity between everyone, and when in the right fre-

quency, it is possible to help others in times of need since everyone is connected. This is a concept that intertwines with modern physics and dates back thousands of years.

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“Prayer is an overcoming of your individuality, your isolation, enabling you to expand,” Dossey said. “It is connectivity and unity with other people. I don’t think there’s anything mysterious about this. If you read the history of the last 3,000 years, people have stumbled onto this. There’s nothing original about it.”

Dossey grew up Southern Baptist on a cotton farm in Texas. He and his identical twin brother, Gary, were the first of his family line to graduate from high school. With scholarships to the University of Texas, the brothers set out to become pharmacists, but decided to go on to medical school instead. Six weeks into medical school, Gary transferred to dental school and Larry continued on to become a medical doctor.

Larry Dossey’s path was interrupted in 1968 by the Vietnam War, where he served as a battalion surgeon in the field but returned to Dallas after serving the country, to continue his passion, internal medicine.

“I did my internal medicine residency in Dallas,” Dossey said. “I was in the emergency room when President Kennedy was brought in. It was a very traumatic event for everyone in the hospital, that the president died in your own emergency room. I was there for that.”

While practicing internal medicine two decades ago, Dossey crossed paths with numerous healers who used prayer to help people get well. His scientific mind compelled him to find the reason and uncovered [scientific literature](#) with double-blind, randomized, controlled studies that used distance healing or prayer to help people. [Studies](#) that provided evidence impressed Dossey.

“Nothing in medical school ever brought this to my attention,” said Dossey. “It simply wasn’t talked about. I thought, well if this helps people, we ought to be using prayer in conjunction with medicine. So, the evidence pushed me in the direction of writing books. And that’s been one of my missions in life since those early days—to write about this evidence and try to make it known.”

Dossey says that there is so much evidence about how effective prayer is that it’s difficult to refute. Hungry for information early in his career, Dossey pored through research and was inspired by renowned psychologist and author [Lawrence LeShan](#). Considered “The Father of

Mind-Body Therapy,” LeShan studied distance healing as related to science more thoroughly than anyone. According to Dossey, LeShan puts the relationship of prayer and healing into a theoretical basis that goes beyond strictly religious connotations.

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“I got in on this area of investigation fairly late,” said Dossey. “There are a lot of people who beat me to this. Lawrence LeShan was a PhD psychologist who died in November 2020 at the ripe age of 100. He’s been an inspiration to me.”

LeShan collaborated with [Henry Margenau](#), chairman of the Physics Department at Yale University and one of the most important philosophers of physics of his generation. According to Dossey, LeShan and Margenau were able to use philosophies of physics to prove the power of prayer.

“One of the reasons why I recommend LeShan is that he’s been a transdisciplinary scholar who just hasn’t settled on the healing component but united it with what’s going on in the realms of physics in the 20th century,” said Dossey. “His material is very powerful.”

According to Dossey, the medical community is missing a critical component in the healing process by not integrating prayer into the process. "I think it's a shame that in our so-called scientific age, we say that healing with prayer is not possible and don't even pay any attention to it," said Dossey. "That's false. If this is not scientific, then nothing is. The studies were done in randomized, controlled environments in hospitals and clinics. And the only reason people don't want to pay attention to it is because of their belief systems. They've made up their minds that this can't happen, this doesn't happen, and they don't care about the evidence."

Dossey says that combining distant, remote, prayer-based healings with concepts of quantum physics that have been implemented over the past century is incredibly effective. "We live in a new world view, which most people haven't woken up to," said Dossey. "Most people prefer the old ideas of the 18th and 19th centuries. That's a shame because it deprives people of the healing force that is real and can be used to help people get well."

Dossey says it's ironic how his medical revelations brought him back to his roots. "I grew up in a Southern Baptist community where prayer was just sort of in the water," he said. "I didn't really take it seriously until I got involved with looking at some of the research that's been

done with some of the healing and prayer and that's where many of my books originated. So, this is really a theoretical issue for me. It's one that's deeply personal.”

Since the start of his career, Dossey has written thirteen books and numerous articles. He is the former executive editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* and is currently executive editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing*. He has become an internationally influential advocate of the role of the mind in health and the role of spirituality in healthcare.

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Dossey's advice to the youth of the world who hold the future in their hands is that they do not have an easy task ahead. He believes they must go after the truth, and says the future of medicine hinges on how these concepts are embraced. “I want young people to know that in going in this direction, you're not becoming irrational or unscientific, you're pursuing the best of science,” said Dossey. “And don't follow the conservative 18th or 19th century views of your predecessors or even your parents. Think for yourself and dig into the science. This is where we're going to wind up sooner or later when

people come out of their cocoons and begin to honestly face the facts.”

“You have to be courageous and take a chance,” said Dossey. “You won’t get this in college, so don’t think you can find a super-duper course that will lay it all out for you, because this is too controversial for most college professors to base their lectures and their careers on. There are still prejudices.”

According to him, the first step is to educate oneself. History has helped him, and he says it’s consoling to know that for about 2,000 or 3,000 years, the brightest people on the planet have embraced the concepts of unitary consciousness and know there are no boundaries between their thoughts and their emotions. “I would suggest to young people to be brave, take some leaps in your logic and thinking,” added Dossey. “You’ll find out that it isn’t such a great leap after all.”

Dossey says being creative in prayer makes it easier to use it in daily practice. He adds that prayer doesn’t have to be formal or attached to a specific religion. “I believe in combining modern medicine with prayer so deeply that I used to go to my office about 30 minutes early every morning,” said Dossey. “I have my own private prayer ceremony for the people I would see in the hospital rounds and who would be coming to my office.”

Dossey urges people to be inventive and creative, advising doctors to combine it into their medical practices. “No specific religion has a monopoly on prayer,” said Dossey. “Be your own prayer master and concoct your own ceremonies. It comes down to love, caring, and compassion. It doesn’t matter the words you use to describe prayer. Compassion, deep caring is the thing that bridges the gap between people and if people can focus on caring and compassion, it seems to liberate the forces that prayer rely on to help people get well.”

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Dossey says that the problem many encounter is that they are stuck in the physical domain. Once they make their peace with their ability to make a difference no matter the distance, they can liberate the healing power of prayer. The problem is that many people are more comfortable keeping prayer in the category of religion, constricted by religious tradition.

“You don’t have to be too serious about this,” Dossey said. “The fact that prayer has an effect, and it works, is a reason to celebrate and not be always negative and down in the dumps about people being sick. You can view sickness as an operation designed to free your own mind to

open up to prayer. So be creative in your thinking and take a leap.”

He has great admiration for what physical medicine, surgery, and medications can accomplish, but he uses them in conjunction with other methods such as biofeedback and prayer.

“I don't know why I have an interest in the use of consciousness to help people get well but it just seems to be part of my DNA,” Dossey said. “I've spent years looking at the ability of human beings to convey messages and distance precognitively.”

Dossey says everyone is connected with one another, which doesn't take away their individuality. There is still a sense of self; however, the connection with others instills an innate unity, caring, love, and compassion for others.

“I think this goes beyond healing,” said Dossey. “If we don't come down to some realization that we're connected with the earth, one another, and that we have a common fate, I don't think that we're going to survive on this planet. We're ecologically fragile and our best hope is coming together with a sense of unity, oneness, and caring for one another. So, we can, in one sense, help each other heal, but we can also help the earth heal.”