

Holistic Health Advisor

Edgar Cayce understood his psychic gift primarily in medical terms for the first half of his forty-four-year history as a clairvoyant reader. Even after the life, work, and Study Group readings had unfolded a rich and complex body of doctrines, medical readings retained priority for Cayce. Any attempt to evaluate him fairly must begin with a consideration of their value, the influences that can be discerned in them, and the evidence they offer for and against Cayce's clairvoyance.

Cayce is often called the father of the holistic health movement, and not only in A.R.E. literature. This might be considered an excessive claim, since Cayce tapped into existing trends in health care rather than creating completely new treatments. On the other hand, his medical readings provide more than just a hodgepodge of treatment modalities, indeed offering a consistent approach. This approach to health coheres with that of the contemporary New Age movement, and increasingly with medical practice as well. If not its father, Cayce is at least one of the major forerunners of the holistic health movement.

An essential holistic theme in the readings is conveyed in the message that "The body—physically, mentally, spiritually—is one *body*, yet in the varied conditions as arise within a physical body, these must often be treated as a unit—that is, each element treated as a unit yet in the fullest application they are *one*."¹ More than two-thirds of the Cayce readings primarily concern the physical body, but even these medical readings are replete with reminders that the physical is an outward expression of what the mind has built.

The Medical Readings

Despite variation among different cases of the same disease, and specific instructions relevant only to particular ailments, there is a high degree of consistency in Cayce's approach to illness. Regardless of the presenting condition, most readings include similar guidelines. For example, headaches were attributed to digestive disorders, and sufferers

were advised to adopt a diet of fresh vegetables and fruits, supplemented by fish, fowl, and lamb, avoiding "white bread, combinations of starches, fried foods, sugar, red meat, and carbonated drinks."² This is virtually the same diet advice given for everyone. Spinal manipulations, electrotherapy, and hydrotherapy were often suggested. Colonics, enemas, and laxatives were frequently part of the treatment proposed. Castor oil packs and massage were suggested in many cases for a great variety of conditions, and constitute the apparent bedrock of Cayce's health care system. Specific conditions received relevant recommendations, e.g., inhalation therapy for influenza, support hose for varicose veins, surgery for tonsillitis, and ointments for hemorrhoids. Cayce treatments combined most widely accepted practices of medical doctors with some highly unorthodox methods. Among electrotherapy sources were the Wet Cell Appliance, "a galvanic battery that produces a small but measurable electric current" that Cayce believed "stimulated the growth of nerve tissue and connections between nerve tissues" and recommended in about 975 readings.³ Slightly fewer readings suggested use of the Violet Ray, a high-frequency device providing diathermy, "therapeutic heating of tissues beneath the skin."⁴ A particularly strong emphasis on proper elimination is found in frequent suggestions of colonics, enemas, and laxatives, but also of external hydrotherapy, believed "to stimulate the perspiratory system to eliminate toxins through the pores of the skin."⁵ This included steam baths, whirlpool baths, and cabinet sweats. Among the reasons given for massage was the belief that it promoted the same kind of elimination. Cayce's pharmacology includes many substances prescribed in the readings, of which the most commonly mentioned are atomidine, a form of iodine described as beneficial to gland functioning, and glyco-thymoline, an antiseptic mouthwash used in many other ways in the readings.

The foundation of the Cayce approach to holistic health is the dietary guidelines given in the readings. For breakfast, one should have cereals or citrus fruit juices, but never combined; fruit, whole wheat bread, eggs, and milk are also suggested. One should lunch on raw salads or vegetable juices, but never with a vinegar-based salad dressing. Cooked leafy vegetables or legumes, with fish, fowl, or lamb in lesser quantity, were the suggested dinner menu.⁶ The rationale for the diet is that one should "Keep those foods that are the more alkaline; that is, do not take red meats . . . no fried foods."⁷ Acetic acid is to be avoided, as are various food combinations, such as starches and sweets, citrus juices and milk or cereal, multiple starches, oysters and whiskey, coffee and milk or cream, or tomatoes and meats.⁸ Carbon-

ated drinks are strongly condemned, as the "gases . . . are detrimental."⁹ Dark breads are said to be preferable to white.¹⁰ The readings advise a ratio of three above-ground vegetables to every root vegetable consumed, and one leafy vegetable to every pod vegetable.¹¹ Apples are said to be better cooked than raw.¹² Honey should be the preferred sweetener, and refined cane sugar is declared especially harmful.¹³ Red wine is recommended, if accompanied by dark bread: "This may be taken between meals, or as a meal; but not too much—and just once a day. Red wine only."¹⁴ Beer and liquor are not recommended, and white wines are advised only with meals. The recommendation of red wine seems prescient in light of recent testimony to its medical benefits. "The French paradox," the low heart disease rate of the French despite their high-fat diet, has been attributed in the popular press to their red wine consumption. Another suggestion that seems ahead of its time is avoidance of "benzoate or any preservative."¹⁵ Aluminum in cooking utensils is discouraged, as "in most people it gradually builds something not compatible with the better conditions in the body-forces."¹⁶

Some of the Cayce advice regarding diet is identical to the "Hay system" taught by physician William Howard Hay in books published in the 1930s. The division between acid- and alkaline-forming foods, the centrality of vegetables and fruits in the diet, the harmfulness of refined and processed flour and sugar, and the avoidance of certain food combinations are all characteristic of the Hay system as well as Cayce's.¹⁷ The specific combinations to be avoided differ in the two systems, and Cayce's dietary suggestions predate Hay's first publication by several years. All that can be deduced from the parallel to the Hay diet is that acid/alkaline balance and food combinations were "in the air" of alternative health literature during Cayce's career. Parallels to other aspects of the Cayce diet can be found in a wide variety of more recent sources, including the American Heart Association.

Growing one's own produce is strongly recommended by Cayce, as is land ownership: "Every individual should own sufficient of the earth to be self-sustaining. For the earth is the mother of all, just as God is the father in the spiritual, the earth is the mother in the material."¹⁸ Apart from the spiritual or psychological benefits of closeness to land, however, is the readings' concern about freshness of produce. They advise, "Do not have large quantities of any fruits, vegetables, meats that are not grown in or come to the area where the body is at the time . . ."¹⁹ Vitamins are recognized as essential, and are defined as "The Creative Forces working with body-energies for the renewing of the body."²⁰ But vitamin supplements are more beneficial if not taken

daily, as constant dosages allegedly interfere with the body's ability to derive vitamins from food.²¹ Much of the dietary advice in the readings is in accord with generally accepted standards, more so now than when Cayce gave it. Only recently have the dangers of fats and red meat, or the value of fresh leafy vegetables and moderate wine drinking, been widely recognized. Another reasonable suggestion in the readings is to avoid raw milk due to infection dangers, consuming only dried or pasteurized milk.²² Perhaps more evident from the standpoint of taste than health is the comment that canned tomatoes are often preferable to "fresh," since the quality of the latter is so unpredictable.²³ Nevertheless, many of the Cayce dietary guidelines are unproven and implausible, for example his claims that "Those who would eat two to three almonds each day need never fear cancer."²⁴ Although there are sound arguments for minimizing pork consumption, Cayce's reasoning falls short of scientific: "Can anyone fill his body with swine and not eventually become piggish or hoggish in his relationships with others?"²⁵ (Elsewhere, the difficulty of digesting pork is cited, so this passage may not be entirely serious in nature; jokes are not unknown in the readings.) Just as peculiar is the comment that "One leaf of lettuce will destroy a thousand worms," which refers to pinworms.²⁶ The readings suggest a three-day raw apple diet for cleansing the digestive system, and gave one cancer patient a watermelon diet.²⁷ But despite some oddities like these, and the forbidden food combinations, the general dietary advice given by Cayce has been solidly confirmed in the half century since his death.

Regular exercise is strongly encouraged in the readings, which call walking outdoors the best exercise.²⁸ The upper body should be exercised in the morning, the lower in the evening, for "equalizing the circulation."²⁹ Massage is frequently recommended as a followup to exercise. Stretching in the morning is strongly encouraged. Cayce insisted on balance between work and play, and the importance of esthetic pursuits: "Keep thine body fit. Keep thine mind attuned to beauty . . ."³⁰

Favorable Evidence

One of the more unusual aspects of Cayce's medical clairvoyance is its recognition by physicians with whom he worked. Cayce's initial partnership with Al Layne, an unlicensed osteopath, was crucial to the direction his life took after the turn of the century. A few years later, Wesley Ketchum's "discovery" of Cayce brought nationwide attention to his gifts as a result of reports to his homeopathic colleagues. Read-

ings frequently required cooperating doctors in order to implement the treatments proposed. Five years after Cayce's death, journalist Sherwood Eddy conducted a survey of eleven doctors who had cooperated with the readings. Two had handled too few cases to participate, but the remaining nine gave answers that were consistently favorable about the accuracy of diagnosis and the efficacy of treatments prescribed. A doctor in Bronxville, New York, evaluated Cayce's diagnoses as 100 percent correct in the twelve cases he had treated. After treating more than twenty persons who had received readings, a Detroit physician estimated the accuracy of diagnosis at eighty to ninety percent. A Washington physician who had seen five patients with Cayce readings gave an eighty percent accuracy rating to the diagnoses. In Albany, New York, a cooperating physician stated that all five patients he had seen had received correct diagnoses. Of nine cases seen by a Port Washington, New York, doctor, the medical readings were correct in diagnoses for all but one. A New York physician who had treated 100 patients with readings by Cayce estimated the accuracy of diagnosis as eighty percent. Another gave no statistical estimates but said that Cayce's diagnoses were "very good." The closest to a dissenting voice was from a Norfolk, Virginia, doctor who said Cayce's diagnoses could not be considered scientific, but still gave evidence of "extraordinary powers."³¹ The consensus among the respondents was that Cayce's diagnostic accuracy compared favorably to that of other physicians, but was by no means perfect. The efficacy of his treatments was rated just as favorably as the diagnoses. The Norfolk physician concluded that "a fair share of those who have been inspired and strengthened to a sincere effort have profited," although "Others lacking in will power and self-discipline have not."³² The Bronxville doctor estimated ninety percent cured; his Detroit and Washington colleagues gave estimates of eighty and seventy percent respectively. The survey question asked about "cures or improvement," and some of the respondents did not speak specifically of complete cures. A Hopkinsville physician said that all the cases showed improvement, as did the Port Washington doctor, who added that some results were "nothing short of miraculous and a source of consternation to local physicians."³³ The Albany respondent reported "marked improvement in all cases," while the second Washington doctor said that in all cases he "was able to get results."³⁴ Eddy's last question was "Have you been impressed with anything unique or significant in these cases of Mr. Cayce? Do you believe that there is a 'supernormal' element in his work?"³⁵ All nine answered affirmatively.

Objections to this survey can be anticipated. First, Eddy does not specify what kinds of physicians reported; the word of naturopaths, chiropractors, and osteopaths carries much less weight with skeptics than that of allopathic practitioners. Even so, Cayce remains unusual among trance psychics in his cooperative relationships with physicians, and in the consistently favorable testimony to his powers found in their reports. Another objection is the small size of Eddy's group of respondents, and their self-selection. Only doctors already adhering to the "Cayce cult," it might be argued, would cooperate with the readings in the first place. Nevertheless, the tone of their responses does not in most cases indicate fervent belief in Cayce, but rather bemused admiration. Sherwood Eddy had obtained a reading for himself in 1938, after hearing five New York physicians testify to the efficacy of the readings. One of the doctors, a personal friend of Eddy, had sought a reading for his own hemorrhages, and was fully cured within a few weeks of beginning the prescribed treatment.³⁶

The most prolific author on the medical aspect of the Cayce work is William A. McGarey, M.D., formerly director of the Edgar Cayce Foundation Medical Research Division. Inspired by Hugh Lynn Cayce's urgings that the Cayce medical readings receive study by competent physicians, McGarey and his wife Gladys, also an M.D., established the A.R.E. Clinic in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1970. This followed fifteen years of study of the readings by McGarey, who according to Jess Stearn, "began treating difficult cases with castor oil packs and other Cayce remedies" in 1957, and was amazed at their success.³⁷ Beginning with the McGareys and a few aides, the Clinic had grown by 1983 to a staff of forty.³⁸ Subsequently the McGareys divorced; Gladys now heads a Scottsdale, Arizona, clinic also applying the Cayce readings. William McGarey identifies Cayce's approach as holistic, pointing out areas in which the readings are particularly relevant to the emergence of a holistic health movement. He describes Cayce's emphasis on "incoordination" as a cause of illness as a "cornerstone in understanding."³⁹ McGarey portrays Cayce's understanding of the role of the lymph glands and the thymus in the immune system as ahead of his time. Cayce's references to Peyer's patches, lymph tissue found in the intestines, also seem to foreshadow later discoveries of their function.⁴⁰ Another aspect in which Cayce was ahead of his time is in appreciating the value of visualization for health.⁴¹ Cayce's use of the term "stress" and his discussion of its effects also was ahead of his time. Spinal manipulation is now more recognized by mainstream medicine than during Cayce's lifetime. Only in recent years is the therapeutic value of massage being widely appreciated in the medical

field; massage is the most frequently suggested form of therapy in the readings, according to McGarey.⁴² The A.R.E. Clinic in Phoenix utilizes "biofeedback, acupuncture, massage and hydrotherapy, counseling, music, movement and color therapy, osteopathy, diet, meditation, dream study, laying-on-of-hands healing, and therapies from the Cayce readings."⁴³ Castor oil packs are a peculiar emphasis in the readings, said to stimulate the elimination of poisons from the system through increasing lymph activity.⁴⁴ Their use for a wide variety of ailments was explored in the Clinic and continues as an emphasis of both McGareys.

Jess Stearns, in *Adventures into the Psychic*, reports a Harvard researcher (unnamed) who estimated that Cayce's diagnoses were right 100 percent of the time, but his cures only 50 percent effective.⁴⁵ The same book has anecdotes about the success of castor oil packs and baldness treatments, and the literature about Cayce is filled with such testimonials. Six case histories are found in *There is a River*; they are cases of epilepsy, "intestinal fever," arthritis, scleroderma, "general debilitation," and eye injury.⁴⁶ All cases were at least partially successful according to correspondence examined by Sugrue.

The only recorded effort to analyze the accuracy of the medical readings is described in Hugh Lynn and Edgar Evans Cayce's book *The Outer Limits of Edgar Cayce's Power*. They found that of 150 randomly chosen readings, seventy-four had no response on file at A.R.E. Some of these may have received positive or negative reports by telephone or verbally, but only those returning questionnaires were counted. Of the seventy-six giving written reports, sixty-five reported favorable results. This provides a rate of 85.5 percent favorable and 14.5 percent unfavorable; which compares well to the success of most physicians.⁴⁷ Criticisms of this study are discussed below.

An early case that brought acclaim to Cayce was that of Aimee Dietrich, daughter of the local superintendent of schools. She had been afflicted with up to twenty convulsions daily following an infection at the age of two. Cayce's reading identified a spinal injury sustained the day before her illness began, and advised a series of osteopathic adjustments, which after three weeks of treatment proved efficacious. Aimee was soon restored to the normal state of a five-year-old, although she had previously seemed hopelessly mentally retarded.⁴⁸ Due to the prominence of her father, the healing of Aimee Dietrich attracted considerable local attention to Cayce.

The testimony that had the greatest impact on Cayce's reputation, however, came from Wesley Ketchum. Ketchum's paper on Cayce was read before a conference of the American Society of Clinical Research by Henry E. Harrower, M.D., of Chicago. According to the *New*

York Times, it generated an immediate deluge of letters and telegrams to Ketchum. In the paper, Ketchum said of Cayce, "I have used him in about 100 cases, and to date have never known of any error in diagnosis, except in two cases where he described a child in each case by the same name and who resided in the same house as the one wanted. He simply described the wrong person. Now this description, although rather short, is no myth, but a firm reality. . . . The cases I have used him in have, in the main, been the rounds before coming to my attention, and in six important cases which had been diagnosed as strictly surgical he stated that no such condition existed, and outlined treatment which was followed with gratifying results in every case."⁴⁹

Another kind of testimonial found in the Cayce literature concerns the clairvoyance involved in locating doctors and medicines. Sometimes readings gave names and addresses of recommended doctors, although neither Cayce nor the patient was acquainted with them. A related kind of anecdote appears in David Kahn's *My Life with Edgar Cayce*. A medical reading advised use of "black sulphur," but the pharmacist had never heard of it and used regular sulphur instead. A followup reading stated that this had been done, and was the reason the patient was not progressing. A telegram was sent to Cayce asking where black sulphur could be found, and he wired back, "Parke, Davis, Detroit, Michigan." The pharmacist obtained it, newly on the market to his great surprise, and the patient was successfully cured.⁵⁰

Miraculous cures of members of the Cayce family form a part of the anecdotal lore supporting Cayce's abilities. In an article entitled "My Life and Work," Cayce described the first time he used the readings for his own family:

My wife became very ill. After several months under the care of three or four physicians, the one in charge of the case called me to his office one morning and said, "Cayce, I am sorry to tell you, but your wife cannot possibly live another week. Everything possible that I know has been done. One lung is choked. No air has been going through it for months. The other is now affected and you must know from the hemorrhages it is bleeding. With the high temperature, with the little resistance, she can not hold out. I will come whenever she wants me, but if there is anything in this monkey business you are doing you had better try it."

Will anyone ever understand what it meant to me to know that I was taking the life of one near and dear to me in my own

hands, and that the very force and power I had been wishy-washy in using for years must now be put to a crucial test?⁵¹

A reading was duly held, and it said there was hope for Gertrude's recovery. The suggestions in the readings were followed closely, and gradually the patient was restored to health. A few years later, Hugh Lynn was also healed in a way that confirmed the family's faith in Edgar's gift. This healing is described by Edgar:

Some years ago I had this experience, which came very close to home. An accident happened, and my wife and I didn't feel it was possible for any aid to come to our little son, who was suffering because of an explosion of flash-light powder in his face. The physician told us nothing could possibly be done. Yet when he told us that the child would never see any more, and that his eyes must be taken out if he could even live, the child himself said: "No. 'cause my daddy when he's asleep is the best doctor in the world, and daddy will tell you what to do and you will do it, won't you?"

The physician promised that he would follow what the reading said; in fact, he did so, and the boy was healed. Did I do anything? Did the doctor do anything? You ask any physician who saw this happen and they will all tell you just as they did me, "It was just a miracle."⁵²

Edgar Cayce's ESP, a small book in the A.R.E. Membership Series by Kevin Todeschi, includes a number of impressive anecdotes from the medical readings and reports. There is no critical scrutiny of Cayce's failures, but the successes are well documented and striking. For example, in one case a reading was given for someone who had called on the telephone while Cayce was in trance; he accurately diagnosed her daughter's injury and identified the locations of both the caller and her daughter. This occurred spontaneously at the end of the scheduled reading, surprising everyone concerned including Harmon Bro, who had been conversing with the caller by phone at the time that Cayce was giving the previous reading in another part of the house.⁵³ Many such cases are recounted by Todeschi, citing supportive evidence in the form of letters from grateful recipients of readings. But his book presents the evidence that Cayce at times demonstrated clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition, without exploring the conflicting evidence of his errors.

In addition to statistical and anecdotal evidence of the readings' accuracy, there are a few topics on which they startlingly foreshadow

discoveries made long after Cayce's death. For example, a reading advised, "Keep the pineal gland operating and you won't grow old—you will always be young!"⁵⁴ A best-selling 1995 book, *The Melatonin Miracle*, launched a national explosion of consumption of the hormone. Subtitled *Nature's Age-Reversing, Disease-Fighting, Sex-Enhancing Hormone*, the book reports results of research that support Cayce's claim. Melatonin production by the pineal gland declines with age. The authors conclude that taking it as a dietary supplement will retard aging. The book states that the pineal's function is "to regulate and harmonize the functioning of a number of our bodily systems," including the endocrine and immune systems, and it thereby serves as "the body's aging clock," reporting several studies in support of this conclusion.⁵⁵ Another comparably avant-garde bit of Caycean advice is that "The sun during the period between eleven or eleven-thirty and two o'clock carries too great a quantity of the actinic [ultraviolet] rays that make for destructive force to the superficial circulation," although moderate sunbathing can be beneficial.⁵⁶ Only in recent years has the danger of excessive sunbathing, especially at midday, been fully recognized.

The most scholarly works on the Cayce medical readings are by Eric Mein, M.D., who spend a year in residence at Atlantic University examining them in detail. His 1989 *Keys to Health* analyzes the Cayce approach to health and discusses his treatments for a number of diseases. (Reba Karp's *Edgar Cayce Encyclopedia of Healing* gives detailed reports on all the diseases and treatments discussed in the medical readings.) Mein concludes that "The bottom line on the readings' accuracy and applicability is still not known. They have never been worked with in a systematic manner or had their efficacy closely scrutinized."⁵⁷ Recently, plans were announced to build a new facility at A.R.E. headquarters housing a research institute devoted to the medical readings, but Mein's judgment remains valid eight years after his book was written. On the other hand, he finds the medical readings to be consistent, coherent, and insightful on many health issues. Moreover, he concludes that they are more compatible with mainstream medicine than most holistic therapies, and contain many elements that have been confirmed in recent years. For example, Cayce stated that testing a single drop of blood would become the norm for diagnostic purposes, and stressed that the immune system protects against cancer, both of which Mein regards as prescient of contemporary trends.⁵⁸ Mein is the founder of the Meridian Institute, which is devoted to research that will "test these [Cayce's] concepts and get them into the mainstream."⁵⁹

Skeptical Critics

Because of the idiosyncratic nature of the readings' medical approach, Cayce has been labeled as a "quack" by some skeptical writers. The first book to attempt to debunk him was by Martin Gardner, whose *In the Name of Science* (1952) was later reprinted as *Fads and Fallacies In the Name of Science* (1957, 1986). Gardner comments that "Sugrue emphasizes the fact that Cayce was a simple, untutored man who could not possibly have possessed the information he gave during his trances, but a far more reasonable supposition is that he absorbed large quantities of knowledge from reading and contacts with friends—knowledge he may have consciously forgotten," alleging further that Cayce "did a vast amount of miscellaneous reading."⁶⁰ But no other source supports this allegation, and all the firsthand observers contradict it; in addition to Sugrue, there is the testimony of Hugh Lynn and Edgar Evans Cayce, as well as Harmon Bro, all well-read and well-educated observers, if not impartial ones. No one who knew Cayce is on record as suspecting that he had ever learned by normal means the information he seemed to master in trance.

Gardner admits that "There is no question about the genuineness of Cayce's trances."⁶¹ But he makes the important point that in the early years the trances were given with an osteopath, then with a homeopath, and concludes that "there is abundant evidence that Cayce's early association with osteopaths and homeopaths had a major influence on the character of his readings."⁶² In the religious readings, the same could be said of Cayce's association with liberal Protestants, Theosophists, Spiritualists, and New Thought disciples. His vocabulary and concepts clearly reflected those of his environment. Students of Freud, Jung, Ouspensky, and Blavatsky numbered among those who sought readings, and Cayce's psychology reflects all these sources. Gardner's hypothesis is that the readings contain "little bits of information gleaned from here and there in the occult literature, spiced with occasional novelties from Cayce's unconscious."⁶³ But unless there was a monumentally successful coverup, involving Cayce's entire family and many of his associates, the gleaning of information from occult literature was not carried out primarily by the waking Cayce, but rather in the altered state of consciousness in which he gave the readings. In their book *The Outer Limits of Edgar Cayce's Power*, his sons explain why this conclusion is inescapable for those who knew Cayce personally. If he had conscious access to the information in the readings, they reason, he

deliberately and skillfully concealed it for forty-three years, even from those closest to him. This leaves, however, the possibility that he unconsciously fabricated the information in the readings from letters and questions. The authors find this implausible, in light of the frequency of cases in which no information was volunteered by the person seeking the reading. In a random sample of 150 cases from the years 1910–1944, they found thirty-five offering no information prior to the reading. Only forty-six of the 150 were present for the reading; in these cases one might hypothesize that information was somehow derived from them in personal conversation. The authors maintain, however, that Cayce made a point of avoiding conversation with subjects prior to giving a reading. Of forty-two who provided partial information, the authors conclude that thirty-six of the readings contained further information not available to Cayce from previous communications.⁶⁴ A fuller examination of this question is presented in chapter 4.

James “the Amazing” Randi savages Edgar Cayce in his *Flim-Flam!* (1987), with special attention to the book by his sons. He opens discussion of the topic by mentioning that “When all else fails to convince the skeptic, promoters of the paranormal fall back on the Sleeping Prophet . . .”⁶⁵ Randi complains of “the myriad half-truths, the evasive and garbled language, and the multiple ‘outs’ that Cayce used in his readings.”⁶⁶ Here is one skeptic who clearly regards Cayce as a conscious fraud. The tone of Randi’s discourse can be discerned in such passages as “Cayce’s ‘cures’ were pretty funny. He just loved to have his patients boiling the most obscure roots and bark to make nasty syrups.”⁶⁷ Although he makes no effort to appear unbiased, even Randi admits that “the matter is hard to prove, either way” regarding the efficacy of Cayce’s cures.⁶⁸ He points out quite reasonably, however, that the non-respondents to A.R.E. questionnaires may have all died, or at any rate been dissatisfied, which would drastically reduce the success rate estimated by Hugh Lynn and Edgar Evans.⁶⁹ Even when cures were reported, the possibility of spontaneous improvement or placebo effect must be acknowledged. Randi concludes that assuming the non-reports to be negative reduces the positive ratio to only 23.3 percent.⁷⁰

A more balanced and comprehensive critique than those made by Gardner and Randi was published in *The Skeptical Inquirer* in early 1996. The author, Dale Beyerstein, makes many points that merit consideration by Cayce’s admirers and detractors. The implicit message of the article, however, is not supported by the evidence and arguments. Beyerstein points out that for the first nine years of the read-

ings, Cayce was always in the presence of a mentor with medical knowledge: first the self-educated osteopath Layne, followed by the medical doctor John Blackburn, and finally the homeopath Wesley Ketchum. (Blackburn was responsible for arranging a meeting in Bowling Green at which several doctors injured Cayce during efforts to find out if he was in a genuine trance.) He concludes that while "it is true that Cayce was not formally trained in any of these professions, he had ample help mastering the jargon."⁷¹ In fact, however, the readings use osteopathic jargon far more than that of homeopathy. Indeed, they state that "As a *system* of treating human ills, osteopathy—we would give—is more beneficial than most measures that may be given."⁷² Osteopathy is mentioned in 4,733 documents on the CD-ROM, compared to thirty-three for naturopathy and thirty for homeopathy. These figures distort the picture somewhat, however, since Cayce adhered to some naturopathic conventions without calling them by that name. But the basic idea of combining conventional medicine with spinal manipulation, massage, diet, and exercise is a keynote of osteopathic practice. Cayce's wide range of folk remedies provides evidence of fundamental compatibility with the naturopathic approach, as does his aversion to drugs and surgery except in extreme cases.

Beyerstein dismisses the records of the readings preserved in Virginia Beach as "worthless by themselves," objecting that there is no record of information available to Cayce before the readings, or of followup reports.⁷³ This is a misinformed judgment. The readings themselves are available at the A.R.E. Library in bound volumes with accompanying documents, and a CD-ROM has been available for several years that more than answers Beyerstein's objections. Background correspondence and followup reports are included in full, totaling nearly 100,000 pages, greatly facilitating research. The full text of readings, medical and other, is provided along with precisely the information that Beyerstein claims is unavailable. Statistical analysis of the data is quite feasible, but in light of the author's dismissive comments one wonders if he would consider it worthwhile; he refers to reports from recipients of readings as "anecdotes that are now unverifiable."⁷⁴ This implies that they do not merit further investigation, which seems inconsistent with the previous claim that such documentation is unavailable. Beyerstein does, however, make five reasonable points about weaknesses in the evidence for Cayce's medical ability.

First, he points out that corroborating evidence from cooperating physicians "is not independent of what it is taken to confirm," since such physicians were already predisposed to sympathy with Cayce.⁷⁵ Corroboration from completely independent sources carries more

weight in Cayce's favor than that from confirmed admirers, and is uncommon but not entirely absent from the files. Second, the author observes that no control group studies were ever done to compare the efficacy of Cayce's treatments with placebos. Therefore, "we have no reason to believe that the patient would not have recovered just as well had he or she never heard of Cayce."⁷⁶ But even in orthodox medical research, there are areas in which control group studies are rejected as unethical. Although such studies would surely provide stronger confirmation than is now available for the Cayce record, Beyerstein overstates his conclusion. The strength of the evidence varies greatly from case to case, making such a sweeping dismissal unjustified. Corroborating documents in some cases indicate that physicians had diagnosed the patients as incurable. Third, the author points out that patients' memories are unreliable, making their reports less valuable as evidence than actual medical records would be. This point is incontestable, but again the author seems to draw more implications than are justified. Some patients gave reports immediately after their treatment, for conditions that were short-lived (for example problem pregnancies) and therefore not liable to the same possible distortion as reports made about long-term chronic conditions or at a greater distance in time from the events. Fourth, Beyerstein warns that "subjective validation" contaminates the database, in that people were so strongly motivated to believe in Cayce that they would imagine positive results where there were none. It is true that corroboration from medical experts would strengthen the case that any given cure was genuine and guard against the contamination of the data base with subjective validation. Finally, the author warns that some of the "doctors" who corroborated Cayce's cures may have been chiropractors, naturopaths, and homeopaths, as well as poorly trained medical doctors, thus rendering their testimony less persuasive to scientists.

All these arguments present valid warnings about the shortcomings of the evidence available. But their intended implication does not seem to be the need for highly rigorous investigation of the data; instead the attitude seems to be typical of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, the journal's publisher. In his *Parapsychology: The Controversial Science*, Richard S. Broughton describes CSICOP's "vigorous public relations campaign," which markets a "narrow brand of scientific fundamentalism" that dictates "which scientific questions are worth asking and which are not."⁷⁷ Beyerstein, like Gardner and Randi, is completely dismissive of the possibility of anything genuinely paranormal about Cayce. The clearest expression of this attitude is found in Randi's words:

The matter of Edgar Cayce boils down to a vague mass of garbled data, interpreted by true believers who have a very heavy stake in the acceptance of the claims. Put to the test, Cayce is found to be bereft of real powers. His reputation today rests on poor and deceptive reporting of the claims made by him and his followers, and such claims do not stand up to examination.⁷⁸

The author confuses demonstrating a proposition to be unproven with demonstrating its falsity. Although the proofs of Cayce's powers may be less convincing than his admirers have recognized, Randi offers no proof at all that he has put Cayce to the test and found him "bereft of all powers."

There is plenty of material in the medical readings that might be used as ammunition by critics wishing to depict them as ridiculous. For example, longevity was said to be extended by silver and gold properly applied and turtle eggs.⁷⁹ Other odd claims are found, for example that the sex of a child depends on the "discharge of the opposite sex."⁸⁰ This is explained to mean that male discharges produce female offspring and vice versa. Crude oil massage is alleged to restore hair when the follicles are still alive.⁸¹ Cayce's insistence that the "Lyden gland," (only occasionally called, semi-correctly, the Leydig) is "that center in which the soul is expressive, creative in its nature"⁸² strikes the inquirer as particularly odd, since the cells of Leydig are an exclusively masculine feature. (There are parallel features in the ovary, however.) Peculiar elements like these indicate that the Cayce medical readings merit a fair share of skepticism. But to allow their implausible elements to overshadow their benefits would be as mistaken as the opposite. Either case exemplifies "halo effect," in which a faulty generalization is made on the basis of biased observation. If Cayce partisans have overlooked some of the more problematic aspects of the readings, this is balanced by the skeptics' dismissive attitude toward the entire Cayce legacy.

New Thought to New Age

Edgar Cayce played a pivotal role in the transition from New Thought healing to the New Age holistic health movement. Although Cayce has obvious affinities with New Thought, his most striking prototype in American history was a Spiritualist, Andrew Jackson Davis. Davis, the son of a poor shoemaker in upstate New York, was "discovered" in 1843 at the age of seventeen by an amateur mesmerist named Levingston. From their first session it was clear that Davis

demonstrated an unusual degree of susceptibility to trance clairvoyance; on January 1, 1844, the subject made his first "flight through space" as he later described it. This refers to "traveling clairvoyance" which Davis soon decided to devote entirely to healing purposes. Like Cayce, Davis claimed to travel to his patients through hypnotic suggestion, diagnose illnesses, and prescribe treatments. Levingston established "clairvoyant clinics" in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and Bridgeport, Connecticut, featuring Davis as psychic diagnostician. But in 1845, Davis broke with Levingston and established a partnership with the Rev. William Fishbough; they opened another clairvoyant clinic in New York City. There he dictated his series of trance lectures which became the book *The Principles of Nature*. During his twenties, Davis freed himself from his sponsor and began writing books explaining his Harmonial Philosophy. He continued to write many books and to practice clairvoyant medicine for many years until retiring at age 83, less than a year before his death.⁸³ David Bell notes that Davis claimed to have read only one book, although critics have seen influences in his writings from contemporary sources.⁸⁴ The roots of Davis's version of Spiritualism are defined by Robert Ellwood as an "amalgamation of the visionary instruction of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish seer, concerning the life of the soul and other worlds, with the trance-inducing practice of Franz Mesmer, the father of modern hypnotism."⁸⁵ The Spiritualist movement absorbed many of the Mesmerist healers.⁸⁵ Mesmerists taught that there was a mysterious fluid or force responsible for the healings induced by their treatment methods, but commissions of inquiry produced mixed results. Mesmer's "animal magnetism" was championed by Madame Blavatsky among others, and greatly feared by Mary Baker Eddy. Gradually, it came to be recognized that the patient was responsible for mesmeric healings, rather than any outer force.⁸⁷ The influence of Mesmerism, outside Spiritualist circles, flowed into mainstream hypnosis but also into the New Thought movement, first called "mental healing."

The first major exponent of mental healing was Phineas P. Quimby of Belfast, Maine. After some years of experimentation with Mesmerism, Quimby concluded that it was the patient's confidence in the treatment that produced results, and not the treatment itself. From 1859 through 1866, Quimby put his newly found theory into practice, promoting his belief that disease was an error of the mind which could be cured by overcoming the illusion. His office in Portland, Maine, was visited by students who became major exponents of mental healing: Mary Baker Patterson (later Eddy), Julius and Annetta Dresser, and Warren Felt Evans. After Quimby's death, mental healing

was dominated by two major approaches: Eddy's Christian Science and New Thought as promoted by the Dressers, Evans, and others. Eddy's authoritarianism drove away some promising Christian Science teachers. Emma Curtis Hopkins was the teacher of Myrtle and Charles Fillmore, founders of the Unity School of Christianity, Ernest Holmes, founder of Religious Science, and the founders of Divine Science. After excommunication by Eddy in 1885, Hopkins had gone on to become the most important influence in New Thought.⁸⁸ 170 documents in the Cayce readings and reports refer to Christian Science, 135 to Unity, sixty-six to New Thought, and twenty to Divine Science.

The Cayce medical readings emphasize the importance of mental and emotional influence on the healing process. Mrs. Eddy's Christian Science is the best known expression of the nineteenth-century mental healing movement. But Christian Science, with its outright rejection of medical care, is the most extreme example of the mental healing movement's legacy. New Thought, a diverse collection of groups focused on similar themes of mental healing, is equally part of the background against which Cayce must be understood. His insistence on the role of Christ in the healing process, like his discussion of attitudes and emotions, shows how much common ground his approach shares with the mental healing movement. The readings state that the resurrection of Jesus Christ implies that God gives the power "that may reconstruct, resuscitate, even every atom of a physically sick body . . . even every atom of a sin-sick soul."⁸⁹ Cayce seems to echo the anti-medical attitudes of Christian Science in stating that "The Christ Consciousness . . . is the *only* source of healing for a physical or mental body."⁹⁰ This similarity is less definite than it appears, however, for another reading explains that all healing is divine:

All strength, all healing of every nature is the changing of the vibrations from within, the attuning of the divine within the living tissue of a body to the creative energies. This alone is healing. Whether it is accomplished by the use of drugs, the knife or whatnot, it is the attuning of atomic structure of the living force to its spiritual heritage.⁹¹

In brief, "healing—all healing—comes from within."⁹² What is commonly called spiritual or psychic healing works by awakening the emotions so as "to revivify, resuscitate or to change the rotary force or influence of the atomic forces in the activity of the structural portion, or the vital forces of a body . . . to set it again in motion."⁹³ Although

illness is often karmic in nature, and "Karmic influences must ever be met," Christ has "prepared a way that He takes them upon Himself, and as ye trust in Him He shows thee the way. . . ." ⁹⁴

Cayce often addressed the significance of attitudes and emotions in medical as well as life readings. Although in some respects Cayce echoes the emphases of the New Thought movement, the readings are considerably more psychologically sophisticated. Three hefty volumes of the Library Series are devoted to excerpts on a wide range of emotions and attitudes. In his introduction to the three volumes, Herbert Puryear, a clinical psychologist, summarizes Cayce's approach. Attitudes are essentially mental in nature, orientations toward experience that determine how we interpret it. Cayce emphasizes that we have free will to modify our attitudes, which are constantly shifting although subject to habitual patterns. Emotions, on the other hand, are more physical than mental, "reaction potentials which are stored deeply within the psychic mechanisms of our beings," according to Puryear. ⁹⁵ Cayce's key phrase "Mind is the builder" applies to the crucial power of attitudes to evoke emotions and thereby affect the body's health. The readings emphasize the role of the endocrine glands in emotional responses. According to Cayce, emotions are rooted in previous Earth lives. Defining and holding to ideals is the recommended way of keeping one's attitudes constructive and healthy. The readings imply that mental attitudes can be changed much more readily than emotional patterns, because they are more conscious and more amenable to self-knowledge. Emotions are reached indirectly through work on attitudes or through purification of the body. Puryear notes that medical readings often began by addressing the need for attitudinal change. ⁹⁶ Indeed, sometimes this is given paramount importance in improving physical health, for example in this reading: "There is much more to be obtained from the right mental attitude respecting circumstances of either physical, mental, or spiritual than by the use of properties, things or conditions outside of self, unless these are in accord with the attitudes of the body." ⁹⁷ Fear is regarded as "the root of most of the ills of mankind," and it can be overcome through the ideals of love, faith, and understanding. ⁹⁸ Self-condemnation is particularly to be avoided, and anger to be controlled.

The New Thought element in Cayce's approach has more in common with that promoted by the Unity School of Christianity than any other denomination. Christian Science and Theosophy are often criticized in the readings, but Unity is always praised. David Bell notes that Divine Science is also consistently regarded with favor by Cayce. ⁹⁹ Charles Fillmore of Unity taught a form of kundalini yoga

based on twelve centers rather than the Caycean seven. His *Twelve Powers of Man* refers to these as "twelve great centers of action, with twelve presiding egos or identities," which govern "the subconscious realms in man."¹⁰⁰ They include the seven centers of Cayce's system and an additional five, but are equated to nerve ganglia rather than glands as in Cayce's system. In a 1925 letter to an inquirer, Cayce commented on the Unity school as well as Theosophy:

I do not know but very little of any of the people who hold to the tenets of reincarnation. I believe Unity and its teachings, and Theosophy, hold to these principles. As to how far the developments have been with these, I know very little. I certainly have not gotten any of MY beliefs in these from either of these groups. As to the work of Mr. Fillmore, as head of Unity, I'm sure this has done and is doing a wonderful lot of good in the United States. As for Theosophy, of course that is one of the older societies and partakes, as I understand, of a great deal of the religions of the East, and England has been having considerable trouble with Mrs. Besant, the acknowledged head of the society at present, in India.¹⁰¹

Although he makes it clear that he wishes neither to endorse nor condemn either organization, Cayce seems to lean in the direction of Unity. As the sole Christian denomination to teach reincarnation, it is the group that seems most compatible with A.R.E. membership. In addition to emphasis on reincarnation, there are several other points of agreement. The readings offer a large number of affirmations for use with meditation; use of affirmations is standard in the New Thought movement. *Lessons in Truth*, a Unity textbook, explains why: "In reality God is forever in process of movement within us, that He may manifest Himself (all-Good) more fully through us. Our affirming, backed by faith, is the link that connects our conscious human need with His power and supply."¹⁰² The readings are much more ambivalent about Christian Science than Unity, although each was recommended at times. By 1944, Cayce was more familiar with Unity than he had been in 1925, as seen in this letter to an inquirer:

So far as our association or connection with Unity is concerned, I have worked with many of the leaders in that group. We interchange literature and a great deal of their literature will be found among the books in our library. Quite often we have had instances where people have been referred to this as a portion of

their treatment, just as they have been referred to other groups. Some of the most remarkable readings have been where the information has suggested that the patient use Christian Science, and one of the most wonderful that I recall through the years, after following a certain line of suggestions, the individual was to read Unity entirely.¹⁰³

Cayce echoes New Thought in his insistence that the Christian life is one of fulfillment rather than self-denial: "Do all in the joyous manner, for His gospel is the *glad* gospel, the *joyous* life, the happy life."¹⁰⁴ In a rare public statement, Cayce disavowed any intent to start a new healing cult, but affirmed his wish to draw attention to the healing work of Jesus:

Mental healing has been a portion of almost every new idea that has been presented to the world in recent years as a new religion. I do not want you to think that I am attempting, in discussing the matter, to found a new sect or ism or to have a following of any kind. What I want is to give a better understanding of the Great Physician, that One who was able to heal by the touch of his hand. I want most of all to awaken in people the consciousness of divine healing that He had so completely developed.¹⁰⁵

Use of the words "Law of" to refer to spiritual principles is equally common in New Thought literature and the Cayce readings, according to David Bell.¹⁰⁶ While "channel" is found in both New Thought and contemporary sources, the meaning has subtly shifted. In New Thought, the term refers to the possibility of being a channel for the divine, as opposed to channeling entities, which J. Gordon Melton traces to the UFO movement.¹⁰⁷ Cayce's use of the term is in its New Thought context. "New Age" is found in Blavatsky and Bailey, among others, but the specific idea that the end of the twentieth century marks its dawning was first emphasized by Cayce.

Phillip Lucas links the A.R.E. to the New Age movement in his essay on the organization in *America's Alternative Religions*. He points out that in the 1970s, "ARE wedded itself to the burgeoning New Age movement and became one of its major promoters," which was "a natural outgrowth of activities and emphases that had long been staples of the association" since "ARE should be viewed as a significant predecessor to the entire New Age phenomenon."¹⁰⁸ He finds "the New Age's eclectic, pastiche-like approach to spiritual traditions and methods"¹⁰⁹ particularly reminiscent of the A.R.E.'s approach.