



Distant Healing and Elisabeth Targ

Elisabeth Targ
Tries mighty hard
To convince everybody that
psychics in California can
Heal the sick in Afghanistan.

—A Clerihew

by Armand T. Ringer

I never cease to be amazed by how easily a set of beliefs, no matter how bizarre, will pass from parents to children, and on to grandchildren. I suspect that the vast majority of true believers in every major religion have parents and grandparents of the same faith. It is rare indeed when sons and daughters make a clean break with strongly held fundamental beliefs of their parents.

This was brought home to me recently when E. Patrick Curry, a retired computer engineer, now a consumer health advocate in Pittsburgh, sent me a batch of material about Elisabeth Targ, daughter of the parapsychist Russell Targ. Readers of *SI* will recall how the

Martin Gardner has two new books of essays: Did Adam and Eve Have Navels? Discourses on Reflexology, Numerology, Urine Therapy, and Other Dubious Subjects (W.W. Norton, 2000), based on his SKEPTICAL INQUIRER Notes of a Fringe-Watcher columns; and From the Wandering Jew to William F. Buckley Jr.: On Science, Literature, and Religion (Prometheus Books, 2000), a collection of his other essays and reviews.

team of Targ and his parapsychist friend Harold Puthoff made a big splash in parapsychological circles in the 1970s. They claimed to have established beyond any doubt that almost everybody is capable of "remote viewing," their term for what used to be called clairvoyance. In addition, they claimed they had validated Uri Geller's psychic ability to remote-view pictures, and his ability to control the fall of dice by PK (psychokinesis). They sat on the fence about Uri's ability to bend spoons and keys because they were never able to capture the actual bending on film. Some parapsychologists called this a "shyness effect."

Russell inherited his psi beliefs from his father, William Targ. When I lived in Chicago I used to visit the father's bookstore on North Clark Street, a store he opened when he was twenty-two. It had a large section devoted to books about the paranormal and the occult. After working for a time as an editor for World Publishing Company, in Cleveland, Targ moved to Putnam in Manhattan where he rose to editor-in-chief. His entertaining autobiography, *Indecent Pleasures*, was published in 1975. At Putnam Targ was responsible for many best-sellers, including Erich von Däniken's notorious *Chariots of the Gods*. (In his autobiography Targ calls it a "quasi-scientific" work on archaeology.) Under his editorship Putnam also published a raft of books about psy-

chic phenomena, such as Susy Smith's *Book of James* in which she reports on channeled messages from the spirit of William James. Targ died in 1999, at age ninety-two. His original name was William Torgownic, taken from his parents when they came from Russia to settle in Chicago where he was born.

William Targ's beliefs in the paranormal trickled down to his son Russell, and now they have descended on Russell's attractive and energetic daughter Elisabeth. Her mother Joan, by the way, is the sister of chess grandmaster Bobby Fischer. Elisabeth is a practicing psychiatrist with an M.D. from Stanford University, and psychiatric training at UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute. Ms. Targ is firmly convinced that persons have the power to use psi energy to heal the sick over long distances even when they don't know the sick but only see their photographs and are given their names.

Elisabeth first participated in psi experiments when she was a teenager. On page ninety-six of *The Mind Race* (1984), a book by Russell Targ and his former psychic friend Keith Harary, Elisabeth is identified as a medical student at Stanford, and an "experienced psi-experimenter and remote viewer." In 1970 she took part in a series of what the authors call successful experiments with a psi-teaching machine. She is said to have recently obtained degrees in biology and Russian.

The authors describe a curious

experiment in which Elisabeth correctly predicted in September 1980 that Reagan would win the November election for president. Here is how the test worked.

Ms. Targ's friend Janice Boughton selected four objects to represent the four possible outcomes of the election: Carter wins, Reagan wins, Anderson wins, or none of the above. Each object, its identity unknown to Elisabeth, was put in a small wooden box. Boughton then asked Ms. Targ, "What object will I hand to you at twelve o'clock on election night?"

Elisabeth then predicted the election's outcome by remote-viewing the object she would be given. Her description of the object was white, hollow, conical, with a string attached to the cone's apex. The object that correlated with Reagan's victory was a conical shaped whistle with a string attached to one end.

Of course six weeks later Ms. Targ had to be handed the box with the whistle. Otherwise, as the book's authors put it, the initial question would have been meaningless.

A similar test of Elisabeth's ability to remote-view a future event involved a horse race at Bay Meadows. On the night before the race, six objects, unknown to Ms. Targ, were assigned numbers that corresponded with numbers on the six horses in the race. As before, Elisabeth was told that at the end of the race she would be given the object that correlated with the winning horse.

Ms. Targ predicted the race's outcome by visualizing something hard and spherical that reminded her of an apple and was transparent. One of the objects was an apple juice bottle. It had been assigned the number on a horse named Shamgo. Shamgo won. Naturally, after the race Elisabeth had to be handed the apple juice bottle to make sense of the experiment.

What a skeptic would like to see would be a transcript of everything Elisabeth said when she was describing the target. Did she say much more than the remarks quoted by her father and his coauthor? If so, there may have been a selection of just those remarks that seemed to describe the target. But I'm only guessing. Also, were there similar

tests that failed? One in four, and one in six, are not low probabilities.

There is more about Elisabeth in the book. In May 1982 she and her father conducted a workshop at the Esalen Institute during which successful remote vision tests were carried out with Ms. Targ participating.

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Elizabeth Targ is now the acting director of the Complementary Medicine Research Institute (CMRI). It is part of the California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC), in turn part of the University of California School of Medicine. Her institute is devoted to investigating such alternative forms of healing as acupuncture, acupressure, remote healing, therapeutic touch, herbal remedies, meditation, yoga, *chi gong*, guided imagery, and prayer. The institute's literature does not mention homeopathy, reflexology, iridology, urine therapy, magnet therapy, and other extreme forms of alternative healing. Apparently they are too outlandish to merit investigation.

In 1998 Ms. Targ received \$15,000 from the Templeton Foundation, an organization established by billionaire John Templeton, an evangelical Presbyterian who showers cash on persons and organizations he thinks are promoting religion. His interest in Ms. Targ's institute springs from her research supporting the healing power of prayer.

In a speech on distant healing that Ms. Targ gave at the Second Annual International Conference on Science and Consciousness, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, April 29–May 3, 2000, she reported that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) now provides funds for research on "distant mental influence on biological organisms." Of more than 135 studies of distant healing on biological organisms, she said, about two-thirds reported significant results. One fasci-

nating study, she added, concerned remote healing of tumors on mice. The study showed that the healers who were farthest from the mice had the greatest influence in shrinking the tumors!

Ms. Targ has received \$800,000 from the Department of Defense to head a four-year study of the effects of alterna-

tive healings on patients with breast cancer. The complementary healings include yoga, guided imagery, movement and art therapy, and others. "We are getting told that we can't study this," she said, "but the beauty of the scientific method is that we can. We can determine if it works—and if so, for whom and how."

CRMI's main achievement so far is a six-month double-blind study of the effects of remote healing on forty patients in the San Francisco Bay area who had advanced AIDS. Forty practicing healers were recruited for the study from healing traditions that included Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Native American shamans, and graduates of "bioenergetic" schools. They were given photographs of the AIDS victims, their first names, and their blood counts.

For an hour every day, over a ten-week period, the healers directed their psi energy to the patients by using prayer or meditation. The experiment was supported by the Institute of Noetic Studies, founded by astronaut Edgar Mitchell, a true believer in all varieties of psychic phenomena, including the powers of Uri Geller, and by New York City's Parapsychology Foundation.

Ms. Targ and three associates reported the results of the experiment in a paper titled "A Randomized Double-Blind Study of the Effects of Distant Healing in a Population with Advanced AIDS." It was published in the prestigious *Western Journal of Medicine* (December 1998). The authors claim

that the twenty AIDS patients who received the healing energy (without knowing they had been selected for such treatment), showed significantly better improvement than the twenty patients in the control group who did not receive the energy. As one report summarized the progress of the group receiving the energy, they had "fewer and less severe new illnesses, fewer doctor visits, fewer hospitalizations, and improved mood."

The NIH, through its National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), has provided funding for Ms. Targ to conduct a three-year study of distant healing on 150 HIV patients. The funding for the first year alone is \$243,228, with a starting date of July 1, 2000. The NCCAM has also funded a four-year project to study the effect of distant healing on persons with a brain tumor called glioblastoma. The starting date was September 18, 2000, with a first-year grant of \$202,596. Both studies, Ms. Targ said, will be double blind. It looks as though Ms. Targ, over the next few years, will be receiving more than two million dollars of government funds for her research on remote healing, the cash coming from our taxes.

Ms. Targ is the author of "Evaluating Distant Healing: A Research Review," published in *Alternative Therapies* (Vol. 3, November 1997), and in the same issue, "Research in Distant Healing Intentionality Is Feasible and Deserves a Place in Our Healing Research Agenda." The executive editor of *Alternative Therapies* is Dr. Larry Dossey, who started the distant healing research with his 1993 book *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine*.

Although Ms. Targ is firmly persuaded that distant healing works, she confesses that no one has any notion of how a healer and helee can be connected over long distances. She closes the second paper just cited with these words: "The connection could be through the agency of God, consciousness, love, electrons, or a combination. The answers to such questions await future research."

Russell Targ's first book, *Mind Reach*,

coauthored by Puthoff, is about their tests of remote viewing when they worked for SRI International (then called the Stanford Research Institute). Margaret Mead wrote the book's introduction. Targ's second book, *Mind Race*, was written, as I said earlier, with psychic Keith Harary. His third book *Miracles of Mind: Exploring Nonlocal Consciousness and Spiritual Healing*, published in 1998 by World Library, is coauthored with Jane Katra, a psychic healer.

The first half of *Miracles of Mind* covers the history of remote viewing, including high praise for Upton Sinclair's book *Mental Radio* about his wife's ability to remote view his drawings. The second half of *Miracles of Mind* is about psychic healing. Targ believes that such healing, especially healing at a distance, is related to the "interconnectedness" of all things by a quantum field such as the nonlocal field of David Bohm's guided wave theory of quantum mechanics.

Miracles of Mind is a strange book. Some chapters are written by Targ, others by Jane Katra. In a few chapters it is hard to tell who is writing. Almost every person engaged in parapsychological research is favorably mentioned, including such far-out paranormalists as Jule Eisenbud, Andrija Puharich, Jeffrey Mishlove, Joe McMoneagle, and many others.

Katra owes an enormous debt to theosophy. She speaks admiringly of Madame Blavatsky, theosophy's founder, as well as England's leading theosophists Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater. I could hardly believe it, but the book cites (page 94) *Occult Chemistry*, a weird 1898 book by Besant and Leadbeater which describes Leadbeater's clairvoyant probing of the interior of atoms. He is actually credited with having first discovered by clairvoyance that hydrogen has three isotopes!

Miracles of Mind takes seriously such paranormal phenomena as out-of-body travel, near-death experiences, chakras (imaginary energy points in the human body), the Akashik Records (on which all Earthly events are recorded), the visions of Edgar Cayce, and the paranormal powers of Philippine psychic surgeons (to which Katra devotes an entire chapter). There are favorable ref-

erences to *The Course in Miracles*, a monstrous, vapid tome said to have been dictated by Jesus. Also mentioned without criticism are the powers of Arigo, Brazil's famous psychic surgeon who operated with his "rusty knife" on thousands of patients, following instructions whispered in his left ear by a dead German physician.

Targ credits Jane with having stimulated a seemingly miraculous remission of what had been diagnosed (by whom?) as metastatic cancer. "I have been well for the five years since Jane did healing treatments with me," Targ writes. "We will never know if I actually had metastatic cancer, or if it was a misdiagnosis. What we do know for sure is that Jane's interactions with me saved me from chemotherapy, which quite likely would have killed me. . . . Did they [his doctors] tell a well man that he had a terminal disease, or did a man with a terminal disease recover through the ministrations of a spiritual healer?" Targ has no doubt that it was Jane Katra who healed him.

The following paragraphs from one of Patrick Curry's letters sum up well the distant healing trend in which Ms. Targ is playing so prominent a role:

The rise of Elisabeth Targ's distant healing studies is *not* a mere example of defective science leaking into medicine . . . it is a leading wedge of a nascent mystical movement that has been gathering tremendous steam in recent years. The parapsychological enterprise has taken on a new life in its alliance with alternative medicine and the consciousness movement. What we have is a very productive alliance of parapsychologists, old-fashioned mystics, new-fashioned mystics, and psychedelic mystics that has gotten a major foothold in medicine.

Their presence is extraordinarily strong within NCCAM (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine) and other alternative-oriented sections of NIH (National Institutes of Health). There is a growing presence at dozens of major medical schools, especially Harvard. . . . They have primary devotion not to the ethics of science but to their own belief that they have a mission in serving the New Consciousness. Distortion, and exaggeration of all sorts, are ignored in devotion to their belief in the new paradigm. □