

## Christian Healing Miracles – An Exposé

### (part 1 of 2): What is a Healing Miracle?



The word miracle has become so common place in today's language that it is often used to refer to something as ordinary as individual good fortune. The Merriam Webster online dictionary defines a miracle as "an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs". Baker's Dictionary of the Bible defines a miracle as "an event in the external world brought about by the immediate agency or the simple volition of God."

Throughout history the notion or belief that prayer, and, or the ministrations of a healer can cure illness has been commonplace. These miraculous recoveries are then attributed to a myriad of techniques commonly classified as faith healing or healing miracles. The term faith healing is best known in relation to Christianity however it is used in a number of other religions, including new age and pagan beliefs. For instance Tibetan Buddhism has always known and accepted faith healings. The practice of laying on of hands is not solely by Buddhist monks but also magicians and mediums. In religions based on witchcraft or pagan beliefs the use of spells and potions for healing requires faith in the practitioner and the gods and goddesses called upon.

According to the majority of Christian denominations the term faith healing or healing miracles refers to healing that occurs supernaturally, as the result of divine intervention or prayer, rather through conventional medical care.

Medical and scientific research has demonstrated that religious commitment aids in the prevention and treatment of emotional disorders, disease and injury and enhances recovery.<sup>[1]</sup> In short people with a religious faith sometimes heal faster than those without. This is usually attributed to an optimistic attitude and hope in the future. Sadly however some segments of today's society reject any medical attention whatsoever and hope to be healed by the virtue of their faith alone. This is a notion that is rejected by Islam.

In accordance with the holistic approach Islam takes to health, there is no contradiction in seeking a cure from both medical science and permissible spiritual means. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said: "There is no disease that God Almighty has created, except that

He also has created its cure.”<sup>[2]</sup> It is also well known that during the Dark Ages the Muslim world kept the early Greek traditions of medicine alive and translated them into Arabic and advanced them.

Islam looks at the miracles rather differently. It defines a miracle as an extraordinary act or event that is contrary to the laws of nature and can only come about through the direct intervention of God Almighty Himself.

Furthermore, a miracle can only be performed by the Prophets of God. Thus an event brought about by a religious, righteous person is not classified as a miracle but, according to Islam is an event known as a *karamah*. Here we see that by Islam’s reckoning, faith healing would fit squarely into the category of *karamahs*. However our purpose here is not to judge Christian beliefs by an Islamic yardstick, rather it is to look at faith healing and discover under what circumstances and for what purpose these events occur.

The roots of today’s Christian faith healing movement are clearly biblical. According to Joe Nickel, “In Christianity, Jesus became a source of restorative power, bringing a healing ministry and effecting miraculous cures of both mind and body wherever he went”. The Christian gospels record more than forty acts of faith healing both by Jesus and his disciples.

One of the best known accounts of faith healing in the Catholic church are the miracles attributed to the intercession of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary known as Our Lady of Lourdes at the grotto of Lourdes in France. The Catholic Church has given official recognition to 67 miracles since the Blessed Virgin Mary allegedly first appeared in Lourdes in February 1858.

The faith healing ministries across North America send to their followers that unrealistic message that if you are sick or poor it is because you do not have enough faith. In relation to this concept 37 year old cerebral palsy sufferer, Justin Peters, an evangelical minister who heads Justin Peters Ministries said, “Two of the most basic human desires are to be wealthy and to be healed.” and “If you believe that God can heal you only if you have enough faith, the burden is on you. If you’re not healed, then what? Who do you blame? Certainly, not God. So on top of the affliction, there’s the heavy weight of thinking that your faith is too weak.” Peters monitors the teachings of prosperity gospel ministers like Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copland, and other faith healers who preach wealth and health as a sign of faith.

In her 2003 essay on “Modern American Faith Healers” Catie Caldwell described a movement that sets out to overwhelm and amaze a populace overcome by the trials and tribulations of 21st century life. The solace and ease that should come from faith in God and his Mercy is relegated to a personal miracle granted to only those who deemed worthy via a human examination of their level of faith. She says, “These charismatic faith-healers have a huge following and are centered around very powerful and wealthy individuals who claim to have special power and anointing from God to heal any affliction. These leaders travel the nation, attracting hundreds, even

thousands, to their revival-like events. People flock to these events seeking healing and deliverance from their visible and invisible ailments. The atmosphere at these events is extremely emotional and the participants claim the “spirit of God” is present and actively healing them. The denominational representation at these events and among the leaders is diverse; it is a very inter-denominational movement.”<sup>[3]</sup>

While Islam acknowledges the healing powers of the Quran and prayer, there is no doubt that the 21st century world is more populated than ever with those who claim to be able to produce miracles and miracle cures. A person must be sure of the place wherein he places his or her trust. There are many people claiming to be healers whose intentions and methods are far from pure and worse still many who are downright evil.

A believer is encouraged to put their complete trust in God, however this does not negate the healing effects of medicine. Indeed, God has power over all things, therefore we need to put our trust in Him, develop a lasting relationship with His book of guidance – the Quran, follow the authentic teachings of Prophet Muhammad and seek a cure, wherever it may be. As believers we are able to use the tools and methods provided to us by God and Prophet Muhammad to sift the truth from falsehood. Those who fall prey to miracle healing ministries may not know how to spot the illusions thus in part 2 we will discuss how these ‘miracles’ are brought about and the objective of those who perform them and any lies and deceptions found in today’s healing ministries.

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#### **Footnotes:**

<sup>[1]</sup> Matthews, D. (2000) *Is Religion Good for Your Health* in Stannard, R. (Ed) *God for the 21st Century* Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

<sup>[3]</sup> (<http://home.wlu.edu/~lubint/touchstone/FaithHealing-Caldwell.htm>)

## **part 2 of 2): TheBusiness of Healing**

It seems that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for many of us – the spoiled century, we are beset with trials and tribulations like never before, the poor are poorer, the sick are sicker, illnesses attack us when we are least expecting them and our immune systems are pushed to breaking point. Also more so than ever before people have access to faith healing miracles. Christians no longer need to seek out ministries in travelling tents; nowadays it is only a matter of turning on the TV or driving a short distance. There is even a drive through ministry that means you never have to leave your car! But are these cures riddled with lies and deception? Let us take a look at today’s healing ministries. While faith healing occurs in many religions and in many parts of the world, the majority

of our discussion will be focused on Christian faith healing in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

Catie Caldwell the author of *Modern American Faith Healers* sums up the premise of faith healing ministries when she describes it as a system that, “attempts to merge two fields: the religious and the scientific. This merging uses supernatural forces to produce a natural, physical result. Faith healing is a charismatic movement that claims the 'spirit of God' is present and actively moving in the settings they create. Participants claim to perform or experience 'modern-day miracles' equivalent to those performed by Jesus and his disciples in the writings of the New Testament.”

As Muslims we are comfortable with the fact that Jesus performed miracles, as a direct result of and by the permission of God. However our faith tells us that these miracles cannot be replicated today. God no longer sends us prophets because Prophet Muhammad is the final Prophet God has sent. This is not to say that God does not perform miracles; many of us consider that even the sun rising every day is a miracle. And anyone who has ever given birth or attended a birth knows that they have witnessed a miracle in action. Now in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we find the Christian world, particularly Middle America, populated with men who are in the business of healing. They call on what they term “special” God given powers for healing the sick and they make a lot of money.

In 2008 when Pastor Benny Hinn visited Australia for three shows, in 28 hours he returned to America \$800,000 richer. After leaving Australia he travelled to New Zealand aboard his \$36 million Gulfstream jet, as part of a 27-stop world tour expected to generate more than \$10 million. A former Eastern Orthodox Palestinian, Hinn has caused much controversy for theological remarks and claims he has made during TV appearances. In 1999, Hinn claimed that God had given him a vision predicting the resurrection of thousands of dead people after watching his show. He is also notable for mistaken prophecies relating to the end of days. In April 2001, HBO aired a documentary entitled *A Question of Miracles* that focused on Hinn and the film's director said, "If I had seen miracles (from Hinn's ministry), I would have been happy to trumpet it...but in retrospect, I think they do more damage to Christianity than the most committed atheist."[\[1\]](#)

Of course, faith healers do run the gamut from cynical con artists to well-intentioned but self-deluded believers. However, the turn of the century has spawned faith healing celebrities that can attract huge followings. At these revivals healing is not a process it is an instantaneous incident. In a typical faith healing ceremony the healer will lay his hands upon the sick and command them to be healed. The “cured” individual is then presented to the audience as proof of a miracle.

The deaf can suddenly hear, the blind can see, the lame can walk and afflictions disappear. Bodies are transformed without any medical treatment whatsoever. Negative results are always explained by attributing them to

personal defects. When faith healings have been meticulously investigated by qualified people, no evidence of a cure has ever been found. Even at Lourdes France, a grotto where sick people are miraculously healed by water, the Catholic Church has only recognized 4 cures since 1978, out of more than 5 million people who seek healing there every year. Unanimously medical science discredits all healings of this kind<sup>[2]</sup>; however medical science does acknowledge that people with religious faith often heal faster than those without. This is normally attributed to an overall attitude of hope and optimism. So you might say what is the danger? According to a number of sources the dangers are numerous.

Many tactics are used to deceive gullible people, including fake audience members and information fed through earphones. Some people do appear to be cured however their illnesses were in fact psychosomatic and the emotionally charged healing meetings are the perfect place to cure illnesses that are of psychological rather than physical origin. In addition to this many people are caught up in the euphoria of the moment and do indeed feel better, this is particularly true of conditions whose major symptom is pain. Other conditions would naturally heal whether or not the person attended a healing event.

On the other hand what happens to those who attend healing ministries filled with hope only to walk away without having been healed? People are hurt; physically and emotionally. There have been cases where people have stopped taking much needed medications to the severe detriment of their health. The effect of not being healed can be terribly disillusioning and healers such as Hinn have deflected criticism by blaming the sick for not having enough faith.

On their website the American Cancer society states that “People who seek help through faith healing and are not cured may have feelings of hopelessness, failure, guilt, worthlessness, and depression. In some groups, the person may be told that his or her faith was not strong enough. The healer and others may hold the person responsible for the failure of their healing. This can alienate and discourage the person who is still sick”.

As Muslims, believers in the absolute and unchanging power of God alone, it might seem extraordinary that people across the Christian world could believe in such arrogant and financially focused men; however, the Christian experience warns us that belief in anything but the power of God is useless and dangerous. It is a warning to those of us who rely on amulets, charms or strange rituals to cure illnesses. God does not want us to leave illnesses and injuries unattended, nor does He want us to pay unscrupulous people for magic potions and poisoned words.

Belief in and submission to the will of God is the most essential part of good health care. The words and recitation of Quran can cure hearts and minds, as well as overcome illness and injury, however complete trust in God does not negate the healing effects of medication provided we use them only in

lawful ways. The Prophet said: “There is no disease that God Almighty has created, except that He also has created its treatment.”<sup>[3]</sup>

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**Footnotes:**

<sup>[1]</sup> Finn, Robin. COVER STORY; Want Pathos, Pain and Courage? Get Real, New York Times, 2001-04-15

<sup>[2]</sup> Mackay 1841; Rose 1968; Nolen 1974; Randi 1989; Nickell 1993; Hines 2003; Barrett 2003.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*