

Prompted by his son's incurable illness, the author, a philosopher, investigates the world of alternative healing. What is the truth behind the powers claimed by healers? This book details his visits and interviews with well-known healers and experts on healing.

THE WORLD OF HEALERS, Reality or illusion

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LEONARD DOBRZANSKI

**THE WORLD OF
HEALERS**

REALITY OR ILLUSION

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
1. FRAU SOFI FROM VENLO	9
2. ANITA FROM LANGENFELD	26
3. PRINCESS KURAGINA FROM COLOGNE.....	43
4. THE MERCIFUL BROTHER BRUNO.....	62
5. “PSYCHIC-SURGEON” - STEPHEN TUROFF-	82
6. A CHRISTIAN HEALER - RON STALEY-	103
7. PIOTR KOZIEL - A CLERICAL HEALER.....	129
8. LEIF LINDBERG - A MAN WITH THREE ENERGIES.....	155
9. CHARISMATIC HEALING - JESUS THE HEALER-.....	188
10. A CLINICIAN ON HEALING - AN INTERVIEW WITH DR.D.J.BENOR	238
11. AN ETHNOLOGIST ON HEALING - AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. W.A. FRANK.....	264
12. HEALING SEEN FROM WITHIN - SUPPLEMENTARY DESCRIPTION-.....	289

INTRODUCTION

Writing this book has been one of the biggest surprises, if not the biggest one, of my life. If somebody told me some years ago when I was still an active academic philosopher that I would come to involve myself in such an enigmatic topic as healing in a near future, I would have to refuse his prediction as making no sense. At that time I firmly believed, as I still believe with some additional proviso, that science, notwithstanding its limitations and failures, was the only known systematic way of gaining reliable knowledge about everything that could be known about man and his surrounding universe. And medical sciences, how imperfect they could have appeared to be, delivered all the knowledge of man's psychic and somatic constitution that was possible for human beings to gather up to our time. All so called alternative ways of knowing this psycho-somatic entity and all alternative ways of treating diseases which were not based on scientific knowledge of man amounted for me to either illusions or simply humbug. I was thus a radical sceptic, if not an agnostic, in regard to healing and all other less or more esoteric domains, which often used to come with a preposterous claim that compared to science they have found a better or at least equal way of knowing and acting. This was my attitude some years ago.

And then I was struck by a very sad experience in my family. My son got severely ill. The doctors, who fought for his life, warned me that even given his recovery, it would be only temporal, as the condition was incurable and chronic. The only known treatment was a symptomatic one. When I got over the first shock, I began to speculate on what the doctors told me. Doubts began to creep into my mind. It could not be true that there was no remedy for my son. It was rather the ignorance of the doctors treating him. I had to check it myself. I put aside my philosophical work and buried myself in medical books. In two

years I read everything that could have any bearings on the problem of his illness. Actually I read everything relevant that I could get hold of at the university library. I almost became a specialist in his disease. To no avail. To my surprise and disappointment I finally had to admit that my suspicions were wrong, the doctors had not been ignorant. It was true; there was no known cure for my son. Science had turned out to be ignorant about the possible causes of his illness. Medical science suddenly appeared to be a much more limited piece of human knowledge than I had assumed it to be so far. My scientific optimism suffered a painful setback. But it was not a theoretical problem I tried to solve. I wanted to find a practical remedy for my son.

I could not stay passive, however. I was determined to fight for my son. I began to look around for help somewhere else. I found thus myself divided and standing in a very precarious and awkward position. On the one hand, I did not give up my belief that it was only in scientific knowledge possible to find a reliable answer to the problems of my son's illness; and yet, on the other hand, having got the answer that there were no answers, I could not accept it as valid. I was unable to dispose of a feeling which amounted to a strange sort of certainty, that there had to be an answer to his problems, if only I also looked into some other areas than science alone.

Determined as I was, I embarked upon visiting the most strange places and people. I went with my son to herbalists, homeopaths, clairvoyants, and all sorts of therapists. My son was subjected to numerous kinds of alternative therapies, including acupuncture, reflexology, kinesiology, etc. In spite of all these first unorthodox treatments, my son did not improve. All efforts seemed to be in vain, though not completely in vain. Having thus discovered so vast an area of treatments alternative to medicine, we were filled with a new sort of optimism, with a new hope. If one unorthodox treatment had not given results one time, we were not to give up, we were to wait until next time, when another treatment could turn out to be a success. The more we tried, the more new possibilities seemed to open up before us. I put thus aside all my

scientific beliefs and went on looking for a remedy. It did not matter to me any longer whether something looked most awkward and incredible, whether it made any sense to me or not, I was only interested whether it would work in praxis.

Quite late in this search of a therapy for my son I discovered the world of healing. Though I was unable to understand how a simple laying-on-of-hands could possibly relieve a sick person from any trouble whatsoever, I found healing, especially after having read numerous reports on almost miraculous cures of incurable diseases by different healers, the most promising area for my further search. So I started to take my son first to healers who had announced their services in local press. But our initial confrontations with those healers turned out to be a rather discomfoting experience. The healers whom we then visited appeared to be able, if one took their words at their face value, to perform the most incredible miracles. They knew in advance that they would easily lead my son to a complete recovery, provided he would come regularly for treatment and obeyed their recommendations. They often supplemented their healing with herbal, crystal, homeopathic therapies and the like. So my son went through a whole series of healing ceremonies with these healers. But I could not spot any change in his condition in spite of these numerous treatments he had got. When I complained about it, I was told that my son and I had to change our mental attitudes as it actually was our mentality that contained the cause of his troubles. If my son could not get better or even got worse instead of improving after healing, then it was his fault, it was him to be blamed, because, as we were informed, he had not actually wanted to co-operate, to change his mental attitude, he had not had enough belief and confidence in the work of a healer. The healer had done his work, he had restored my son's "energies" to the state of equilibrium and thus created conditions for his complete recovery, but my son's disbelief and negative attitude destroyed the healer's work. I was then expected to accept the answer that it was actually my son's and my own fault and not the healer's failure, which were responsible for the fact that my son

could not be cured. This was too much even for such a desperate father as I was. Disappointed, distressed and impoverished by healer's bills we quitted local healers.

Disgusted with these boastful and greedy healers I was close to giving up my search completely. But I paused instead. After some time I decided to investigate the healing area again. But this time I was determined to show more caution and criticism in my search. Nothing was to be left to a mere chance or whim. I wanted once and for all to find out whether there really was any substance in those fairy-tales on miraculous cures I had earlier read about, whether all my search in this area was not aimed at an illusionary last straw on which a "drowning" father tried to lean. This time I did not look for any healer's announcements in the press or in the yellow pages of a telephone directory. Instead I began to read apparently serious books on healing and some more or less esoteric international magazines. From what I had read I managed to pick up some names of European healers who were promoted by journalists and writers to be "famous" ones and, what was more important to me, a few names of experts in the area of healing. Then I wrote letters both to the experts asking for recommendations about some genuine healers, and to "famous healers" in order to get appointments with them. I went also to few international congresses on healing, where I met several healers and experts. After having thus selected quite an impressive list of allegedly genuine healers, I decided to start touring Europe with my son in order to pay all of them a visit.

It took us more than two years to meet the healers on my list. Our confrontations with these less or more "famous" people did not always differ that much from our earlier experiences with local healers. But a few persons on my list turned out to be genuinely endowed with the most unusual abilities. I could observe them remove pain from a suffering person by a simple touch of the hand, or to loosen stiff joints in a person with arthritis who came leaning on crotches, hardly dragging his feet and after a few minutes of the laying-on-of-hands he could leave healer's clinic freely moving his legs. I met many patients in their clinics

who could tell me about the great improvement they experienced after having had received healing, also for conditions which earlier had been unsuccessfully treated by all medical means. And though my own son had not experienced any miraculous cure, as I had hoped, I had to admit that there was also some improvement to be noted in his case after treatments he had received from some of these healers.

When I was just in the middle of my European healer tour with my son, I carelessly confided my experience with healers to one of my friends, because, as I remember it now, she asked me whether I did not consider it a good idea to share my experience with a greater number of people. At that time my immediate response must have been a negative one, as I was not yet convinced about the real merits of healing. First some time later and after more visits to healers, I began to understand that a lot of what I had observed myself as well as everything that I had heard from patients were in favour of healing. I could not suppress anymore awareness of the fact that healing worked, not always, but it worked. I saw it several times with my own eyes. But if healing really worked, if my conviction about it was well founded, then it had to be of some importance to share this message with others. Not only because this message could be of potential help and comfort to these people who suffered from so called incurable diseases, but also for all those healthy people, who like me, unconsciously allowed themselves to be infected with the so called scientific world outlook which crippled our life by banning from it all spirituality and reducing it solely to an amoeba like existence. Because healing, as I saw it, was actually a spiritual activity. It acted on a physical body, it brought about changes in the material body of a patient, as I observed several times, not by the application of any physical force, but solely by a purely intentional, spiritual effort of a healer. Healing was then in its nature something spiritual.

It then remained clear to me, that admitting healing to the family of real phenomena, including it into reality, had to amount to nothing less than to an act of accepting that spirituality

was an integral part of our actual existence, that it was a part of our life. Further it meant that spirituality, the spirit, not only existed as a passive piece of this world but also as an active agent that was capable of influencing or even controlling matter. Healing at work was actually an instance and evidence of the spirit's capability to change and control physical conditions in the human body.

Though I was then convinced about the reality of healing and ready thus to accept the existence of spiritual world, I was at the same time not at all ready to part with my beliefs as to the merits of science. My firm belief that science was the only source of reliable knowledge about man and his surrounding universe had not changed at all. By accepting the world of spirituality, by admitting reality of a higher spiritual layer of human life, I did not deny any scientific truths, I did not revolt against science. But I did revolt against this primitive by-product of science which had been created on its fringes as a so-called scientific "world outlook" or ideology. Science never laid down metaphysical verdicts as to what might and what might not exist. Science, according to its nature, only investigated the universe of inter-subjectively and empirically given facts and processes. And science limited its judgements to saying only what empirically existed and how it worked. But scientific ideology misused science and its authority by creating an impression that scientific statements dealt with the one and only existing reality. If science could not confirm the existence of spiritual world, then it had to mean that such a world did not and could not exist. And because spirituality by its very nature was not an empirical fact, science could never confirm its existence. All spirituality, all spirit was then declared to be a simple relic of tradition and superstition that deserved to be completely banned from our modern life. Though this refutation of the reality of spirit was very primitive in its nature, it turned out to be quite efficient, as it managed to convince our modern society quite well that any spirituality is just an illusion. By accepting this illusion for reality I was just parting good company with the scientific world outlook but not with

science itself. Being thus convinced that healing works, that spirituality exists, I began planning my work on a book. From a practical point of view I had to revisit some of the healers I had already met and meet some more from my list to collect material needed for my writing. This was the easiest part of the task. It was much more difficult to decide in which form to present my experiences. I knew from the very start that I would not try to convince anyone about anything through my writing. I was well aware of the fact that there are many things in our life which we could not get acquainted with, which we could not be convinced about, unless we lived through them ourselves, unless we had our own first-hand experience of them. And healing, spirituality was one of these kinds of things. So even if I were to present some of my positive experiences with healing, they could not be used for the sake of argument, they could not be treated as evidence for anything. I decided then to limit my writing to a bare description of what I had actually experienced while visiting different healers, to a description of what I had seen with my own eyes, what I had heard with my ears, what I had felt with all my senses. I assumed the attitude of a sceptic rather than an healing enthusiast. I was also determined to stay open-minded and objective, no matter what I was about to observe or hear.

I started afresh seeing healers and then writing down my experiences. As it was my intention to share as much of my experience as possible with others I decided to supplement my descriptions with quite a number of details that contributed in one or another way to the quality of my own experience. And it is my hope that these detailed descriptions will help the reader to be my actual companion during my visits to healers.

And now the book is completed. It only contains descriptions of a few of the healers from my list, but I hope that even this small number of descriptions should be sufficient for conveying a picture of diversity present in the methods of healing and concomitant beliefs. The descriptions of my encounters with healers seem to ask for some elucidation and invite drawing some sort of general conclusions. But as my acquaintance with healing

is of a rather recent nature I decided to ask two scientists, known for their work on the problem of healing to do this job for me. Two interviews with experts on healing follow the descriptions. Though these interviews fulfil, no doubt, their function by shedding light on the problem of healing, I have yet found it expedient to follow them with a description of healing that has been founded on my personal experience of the phenomenon. This *supplementary description* rounds up the presentation of my four year long excursion to the world of healers.

If my book can just manage to stimulate a few readers infected with what I have called a scientific world outlook to reconsider or just reflect upon their attitude, if it can give others an incentive to reflect more broadly on their own spirituality, I will regard my work for having fulfilled its objective.

And now to end this introduction let me just say that this book could not have been written if it were not for my family's support, especially my wife's, and the precious time given to my disposal by the healers and experts.

1. FRAU SOFI FROM VENLO

Venlo, a middle size Dutch town on the border with Germany. a town without any characteristic traits, similar to hundreds of other border towns of our continent, which are only known to their own inhabitants. One more sleepy, provincial town in Europe.

When one arrives at Venlo from the north-east, the road leads through corn fields, which do not seem to respect any national borders. The fields stretch from the nearby German villages up to a great park placed on the outskirts of the Dutch town. Where the park ends, and a road sign proclaims the name of the town, a broad avenue with huge trees planted on both its sides begins. The avenue bears the name Stalbergweg. If one drives about 200 meters down the avenue, one comes to Stalbergweg n. 285. Here, in a huge villa built of red bricks lives Frau Sofi. Since she moved here i 1991 from Düsseldorf, Germany, the name of this provincial Dutch town has become known to the millions of Germans and foreigners who have learnt about the existence of a "lady with magic hands" from the press and television, who creates inexplicable miracles in the border town. "The German Djuna", as some newspapers also called her, became a symbol and sign of the town of Venlo.

In the company of a few persons from Denmark I arrive at about ten-o'clock a.m. at no. 285. One hour too early. I was informed that Frau Sofi first receives her patients and visitors at eleven o'clock. It is a cool spring morning with showers and wind. More out of pure impatience and curiosity than from the need to find a shelter against the gusts of the wind, I go together with my company up a few stairs, which lead to a tiny porch where the main entrance to the villa is placed. As we are just to sit ourselves down on a porch bench, we discover that the main door is half-opened. In spite of our early arrival, we decide to have a

cautious peep inside. We hardly manage to open the door and make the first step into the hall before we immediately run into a man standing there with a cordless phone in his hand. He is showing us the way up the broad stairs, which lead to a room on the first floor. The man makes a strange impression on me. Though he is smiling discretely and in a gentle and welcoming manner his arm indicates the way up for us, there is something disturbing about his face. His dark eyes lack as it were lustre and the lineament of his face expresses a sense of detachment. While he is looking at us, I have the impression that his sight does not rest upon us but reaches behind us and is focusing on something that is in our background. I feel a little bit uneasy. Later on I will learn, that we have met Frau Sofi's husband, Josef, who for over six years was almost blind (10% of normal vision), and who regained his sight in 1986 owing to his wife's miraculous hands.

When we enter the room shown by Josef, I discover that there already are seven persons sitting along the walls and waiting for Frau Sofi. The room with a wooden ceiling is hardly twenty square meters large. In the middle of the room there is a black stool. Alongside the walls sixteen chairs are placed. The walls are decorated with numerous paintings, which seem to underline the special nature of the place. An icon of the Virgin Mary is hanging on the wall and an oil painting of Christ. But the most impressive item is a symbolic picture which shows a dark, high room reminding one of a monastery cell with a tiny, square window just under the ceiling; through the window's opening a mighty beam of light comes and cuts out of the darkness a clear, bright green island from the surrounding grey-black landscape.

My companions and I take our seats by the wall. While we are waiting for Frau Sofi, we chat with the others. I listen to a German lady in her fifties, who tells us that she had been suffering from Morbus Crohn for over twenty years, having then up to ten attacks of diarrhoea a day, and that her seven days visit to Frau Sofi last year brought her sufferings to an end. She now comes here at least once a year not only to make sure that the illness does not come back but also because she feels a spiritual need to do so.

Other people talk about equally miraculous recoveries. But there are also some persons who despite Sofi's healing are still troubled by their problems. While we are talking together in this way, the little room is coming packed with people. Josef brings more chairs, but there are limits to the room's capacity. We are now twenty persons gathered in the room, and there are still more waiting outside in the hall. The majority of these are elderly people, but there are also three young couples with their children and two girls in their teens. The time is now eleven and we are still waiting for Frau Sofie.

At quarter past eleven Frau Sofi eventually appears in the room. According to our Scandinavian standards she is a little figure with black, curled hair and dark brown smiling eyes. The first impression I get of her is overwhelming, almost unreal tranquillity and self-control which radiate from her whole person. In her quite foreign sounding German she begins to ask each and everyone about his or her particular problem, about the results of this "irradiation", as she calls her healing, which some patients have already received. When she turns to us and experiences that there is also a philosopher in our group, she begins to mock academic philosophy, and expresses a hope that the philosopher will be able to experience something under his visit here, which would give him good cause to think in his further philosophical pondering. Then she turns to a man in his sixties who is suffering from spine problems, and asks him to be seated on the black stool.

As Frau Sofi notices that some of us are sitting with folded hands, she asks us to keep them separated and with the palms of the hands up. She also asks all of us to pray silently for the recovery of the man sitting on the stool.

Then she approaches the man on the stool from behind. She stays there with her hands resting on his shoulders. It looks as if she was gathering all her strength and deliberating on what it is to be done in this case. After a while she removes her hands from the man's shoulders and at the same moment the upper part of his body begins to rotate. While the man is quite violently rotating his body, she goes around him in circles with half-stretched arms and

her hands or rather fingers begin to make more or less awkward movements. It seems that the fingers have got hold of some invisible threads or rays, which they draw out of the man's body. The threads are being collected, twisted round, separated and collected again in invisible bundles. It looks as if Frau Sofi was in the process of weaving the man into a cocoon made out of an invisible tissue. When one looks at her eyes while she is busy with "weaving", one cannot avoid the impression that she must be spiritually some other place than in this room. All this takes place while the man's body is continually rotating on the black stool. Sofi's walk around the man reminds of some exotic ritual dance. When Sofie reaches the level of the man's knee with her fingers, which seem to be closing up an invisible cocoon, the dance and treatment are brought to an end. Sofie now staggers a little bit towards a washbasin, while the man's body slowly finishes its rotation. While Frau Sofi washes her hands, her eyes again become quite normal, she is spiritually back among us. The man returns to his chair. Everything has lasted about fifteen minutes. Sofi now asks the man whether the treatment has brought him some comfort, and when she receives a confirmatory answer, she says loudly "Thanks be to God".

After a while Sofi takes The Holy Scriptures from a bookshelf and hands them to the man, who has just received treatment. She asks him to open the Bible at random. Then she gets somebody else to read loudly in the text opened in this way. While the text is being read, she interrupts several times to make comments, to interpret, to ask questions, all seeming to be aimed at making the man aware that the text thus accidentally chosen by him precisely suits his actual problems and the whole of his life situation. The man cannot understand how he could open the Bible at that very place, but he admits that the text explains just those problems to him, which he has met recently.

After this short Bible exegesis, the next person is being shown the seat on the black stool. This time it is a girl in her twenties. Earlier, while talking to the waiting people, I have learnt that this girl was completely paralysed when she was brought for

the first time to Frau Sofi. She now visits the healer from time to time, because she has still some minor problems with her movements. When she gets up and goes to the stool, I cannot see that there is anything wrong with her. She sits herself down on the stool, and Frau Sofi, like in the previous case, takes place behind the girl. At the very moment when Sofi's dance around the girl begins, I notice small contractions of the girl's legs. They gradually grow in force to eventually become quite violent jerks. The girl begins to lift her legs rapidly so high that her knees touch her chin. I discover after a while that these jerks are as if steered by Frau Sofi's feet which she stamps all the time in an increasing tempo. Everyone in the room can see that each stamp of Sofi's feet is being answered by the violent jerk of the girl's legs. Like earlier, Sofi weaves an invisible cocoon around the girl's body. And again, after hardly fifteen minutes, everything goes back to normal, and again Sofi thanks God that she was able to help another human being.

After these two rather dramatic looking treatments, I witness several quite peaceful courses of healing. I can again see Sofi's dance and "weaving", though there is no special reaction from the patients this time. So it is our turn. As we have previously arranged with Frau Sofi, two of our group will now be allowed to take a seat on the black stool. We would not only like to see the treatment, but also experience it on our own bodies.

I go first. When I sit down, I assume a posture quite artificial to me. My back, which I usually keep quite stooped, is now completely straight. It is not difficult to notice that I must be tense, uncertainly waiting there for treatment with the palms of my hands turned up and half-closed eyes. Frau Sofi who stands behind me asks me to relax and at once she starts her invisible weaving work. My body remains immovable up to the end. When the treatment is over, and Sofi asks me whether it has done me any good, I make a face, which quite clearly shows that I must be doubtful about it. When we later on talk in our group together, I report to others that I actually felt something like air-rays during the treatment that very gently were cutting through my body. The

feeling was strongest in the head. I also experienced a sort of power, which tried to move my body, but as that power was rather weak I could completely control its influence.

The next from our group to take the position on the stool is a lady, a Danish film producer. As she sits over there in the middle of the room, everyone can see from her posture that contrary to the philosopher she is completely relaxed. When Frau Sofi removes her hands from her shoulders, the upper part of her tall body begins to sway. She sways her body in a steady, slow tempo. There is a certain gentleness and harmony about her movements. As I have seen it earlier, Sofi also draws threads out of the film producer's body which are invisible to me, threads which are eventually gathered together in an egg-like form which apparently embraces the lady. The film producer thanks her for the treatment and confirms that it has given her some comfort. When I talk to her later on and enquire about the reason for her movements on the stool, she tells me that it was a kind of inner force that pulled her body to and fro. She neither tried to control the force, nor to analyse what was going on. Without letting go completely, she tried to be neutral and open to everything that was going to happen. In her own words: "I was simply available for the experience". When I try to dig a little deeper into her recollection of the experience, she tells me that during the treatment she felt a sort of a wave like motion of some sort of energy. The motion started from the lower end of the spine to spread itself upward through out the whole body. In her head she had a feeling of a very intense energy, which could be described as a state of charging.

After these two "experimental" treatments the plan was that our small group was to leave Frau Sofi's home and I was to return later, in the evening, to do an interview with the healer. But it turned out that the film producer needed some rest after her experiences, so we stayed until the next treatment was over.

This time it is a girl who has come here with her father, a pharmacist from Luxembourg, in a hope to regain her hearing after ten years of deafness. All medical efforts, as her father told

me, had not given any results and she was condemned to remain deaf forever. Today it is the fourth time she is to be treated by Frau Sofi. The father assured me that already after the second treatment the girl's hearing began to come back. This almost miraculous experience made them decide to stay in Venlo as long as it was needed for her full recovery from deafness. The girl sits down on the stool and Frau Sofi begins the treatment. Though I can also now see the same movements of the fingers, which get hold of something that is invisible, there is no "weaving" of the cocoon this time. After Sofi's hands have made some manipulative movements in the air above the girl, which lasts just a few seconds, I notice that the body of the girl begins to lean slowly to the right side. Gradually the inclination of the body is so great that it seems to defy the laws of nature. When the girl is on the verge of falling down from the stool, Frau Sofi makes few very fast movements with a hand in a distance of about fifty centimetres from girl's body, and it turns out to be enough to restore the balance and to bring the body to a vertical position. Once again I have witnessed something that I cannot comprehend, something which is apparently in conflict with our daily experience as to the way in which it is possible to influence the position of physical bodies. The girl slowly gets up from the stool, says thanks to Sofi and God, and returns to the chair beside her father.

When Sofi reaches again for the Bible, my companions and I apologize and after saying thanks for the session walk out of the little room. Before we leave the house, I approach Josef who is still sitting in the hall talking to some people and ask him whether it would be possible to get a few names and addresses of some of those "incurably sick" patients who were healed by his wife. Josef asks me to wait a while, and he disappears in one of the house's rooms. When he comes back, he is carrying two thick volumes under one arm and a videotape in his hand. While handing me this all over, he apologizes for not being able to give me more documents on his wife's work at the moment. What he has just brought, he says, is only a small fraction of a huge heap of

patients' letters, which still wait on his desk to be set in some order. "In these volumes you will find, besides the letters from the patients, also some press cuttings concerning my wife's work which you perhaps will find useful, if you decide to write about her", Josef explains. "The tape is worth watching too", he adds, "because it also shows some of Sofi's incurable and yet cured patients". With this heavy reading matter, which I have received from Josef, we eventually leave Sofi's house to hurry to a hotel where I am to prepare myself for tonight's interview with the healer.

When I begin to browse in the stack of documents in a search for the most spectacular achievements of Sofi, I soon discover that the task that I have taken upon myself is hopeless. All of her achievements appear to be equally sensational. I begin to ask myself whether it is more spectacular to cure a cancer patient than an epileptic. Eventually I decide to pick up exemplifications of Sofi's ability at random. But first, I try to gather as much personal information from the press cuttings on the "German Djuna" as possible in order to avoid using interview-time for this purpose. The information, which I extract from the cuttings, can be summarised in a few lines.

Frau Sofi, whose complete name is Sofi Tachalov, was born in Tadjikistan, USSR, in 1947. She is from a family of seven. After graduation from a gymnasium, she enrolled for Russian philology at the local university. Her studies were interrupted when she emigrated as a Russian Jew for political reasons to West Germany in 1976. She settled down in Düsseldorf, where it was not until many years later, in 1987, that she started her actual activity as a spiritual healer. In 1991 she was forced to move again, this time to Holland, because the German law does not allow any healing activity from people who have no medical or para-medical education.

After having thus satisfied my interest in the personal background of Frau Sofi, I begin to read some letters chosen by sheer chance from her grateful patients.

Mrs. Anne R. (the name is changed) from Bergisch-Gladbach in Germany writes the first letter that falls into my hand. She expresses her thanks for being saved from "certain death". For many years she suffered, as it appears from her letter, from cancer of thyroid gland. In spite of all chemo- and radiation-therapy she had received, the doctors ascertained metastasis of cancer cells in the spine. She visited then Frau Sofi several times. And now she gives expression to her gratitude for being completely cured. The last medical examination, as she reports, has not shown any cancer cells in her body.

A sixteen year old pupil of a secondary school, Andreas P., writes another letter from Leverkusen, Germany. He begins his letter with a description of the "catastrophic" condition he was in when his mother brought him in for the first time to Frau Sofi. Andreas was suffering from a chronic liver inflammation caused by an autoimmune disorder. The doctors could only offer him an immuno-suppressive therapy with cortisone lasting an indeterminate time. His mother who had read about Frau Sofi in a magazine decided to visit the healer with him. And now after a completed series of Sofi's "irradiation", Andreas writes, " You have managed it with your bare hands, without even touching me; I find it fabulous, you have transformed my whole body!"

The next letter I find is sent by parents of the two years old Irene D. When the girl was born, the doctors discovered that her kidneys were in so poor condition that she was deemed to be a dialysis patient for the rest of her life. One of the kidneys was completely non-functioning, while the second one was functioning only up to ten percent of its normal capacity. After only three treatments by Frau Sofi, the parents write, both kidneys began to function completely normally. They express their gratitude for this "incredible miracle".

These three letters chosen at random are followed by hundreds of similar ones that I find in the heap of papers received from Josef. Child-paralysis, allergy, asthmatic disorders, spine problems, cancer, etc., to be short, all possible diseases which the suffering people tried in vain to get rid of by medical means, seem

to retreat under Frau Sofi's hands. As I am reading this almost endless series of reports about accomplished miracles, my sceptical mind tries to intervene and cast doubts as to the veracity of the letters' content. The culture and society in which I live do not seem to have any conceptual framework that would allow for accommodation of the miracles. Miracles according to our scientifically dominated mind are impossible and belong to the mythical past. And here I am, holding in my hand only thanksgivings for miracles. All authors of the letters report that they went to the doctors before they decided to see Frau Sofie. All of them were subjected to orthodox medical treatment, which could not effect any cure in spite of all our scientific knowledge and all our modern equipment.

I finish reading the letters and start playing the videotape that I have received from Josef. The videotape contains a broadcast from a German TV channel, RTL, recorded at Frau Sofi's house in Venlo. Among other things we are presented with one of Frau Sofi's patients, Mrs. Rosa Zettelmeier. She tells the reporter the story of her first visit to the healer after she had received the message from her doctor that there was nothing more to be done in her case. It was just after a long session of chemo- and radiation-therapy for cancer tumours. The tumours, which first attacked her lungs, were rapidly spreading to other organs and parts of the body. The doctors gave her just few months left to live. But after a series of Sofi's treatments, the cancer began to recede. And now she is completely healthy again. After Mrs. Zettelmeier we are shown doctor Bertram Krug who had personally examined this patient both before and after Sofi's treatments. He also confirmed the patient's full recovery. He was so surprised at witnessing the recovery of Mrs. Zettelmeier that he decided to pay a visit to Sofi's house to enquire what was actually going on in Venlo. When the TV journalist asks him about his opinion on this miraculous recovery, he begins answering by making a distinction between his academic-medical view of the human being and illness and the view which Frau Sofi's activities are based on. As a medical man he cannot comment on what he

here can confirm as a recovery. And yet if one accepts, he says, Sofi's view that there are no "diseases" but only that what she calls "being sick" /Kranksein/, and further, that there is a spiritual dimension which is decisive for body's functions, then one may well think that Sofie exercises the influence on the patient's body exclusively by acting on the spiritual component of the patient. This influence that she exercises may well be the result of transferring of some kind of spiritual information from her to a patient. Besides, there is no doubt that she also acts energetically on her patients, though it is impossible to say what sort of energy is involved here. In any case, though the doctor sticks firmly to the academic picture of man and disease, which he is most used to, he is nevertheless now ready, after his experience with the patients treated by Frau Sofi.

Prompted by his son's incurable illness, the author, a philosopher, investigates the world of alternative healing. What is the truth behind the powers claimed by healers? This book details his visits and interviews with well-known healers and experts on healing.

THE WORLD OF HEALERS, Reality or illusion

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