

‘THE HEALING PLACEBO’

Summary

By

Arushi Srivastava, II Year, Masters in Applied Psychology (with specialisation in Clinical and Counselling Practice), Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
Tarun Kumar, Co-founder, AZIMVTH Ashram, Haridwar India

‘The Healing Placebo’ under the aegis of ‘Dialogs & Discourses’ at the AZIMVTH Ashram was a virtual programme. It was held for 12 days culminating on 24th July 2021 the day of Guru Poornima. The focus was on sharing experiences, knowledge and views related to topics like the Placebo effect, inner healing and transformation, power of thoughts and beliefs. It was a medium to connect to the like-minded people and gain a deeper understanding of these phenomena. Participants also learnt how to craft their own individual meditations. Please check the website AZIMVTH dot org for a summary of each day. One may also express interest with joining forthcoming programmes.

‘The Healing Placebo’, was a 12-days-long series of discussions. These sessions created a sanctuary for participants to deep-dive into sea of healing ideas oriented around topical yet frequently talked about themes like the Placebo effect, personal transformative power, inner healing, power of thoughts, beliefs, faith and the like. Over the span of 12 days, participants covered a gamut of topics aligned with the aforementioned topics. Outlined below is a succinct summarization of the discussions and the topics covered.

Day 1

Participants talked about the story of a medical practitioner and how he was able to recover from a serious injury all by thought alone. This set the stage for the topic of placebo and inquiries with a concept like this -- is it possible, if at all? This discussion was also filled with people’s personal understanding of the concept of the placebo and the basic principle it propagates. This Discussion encapsulates a couple of stories to make us familiar with the working of our thoughts. This is an extension to the elaboration of the meaning of thoughts and how they hold the potential to make us better and worse, based on their application and usage.

Day 2

Having gained a brief glimpse of the placebo, we turned to understanding the history of the placebo and how it came to be known and understood today as it is. The journey started from spirituality, ancient wisdom, and the fables, to the world war, to the development of psychology and consideration of placebo in the field, to the present-day neuro-scientific researches around the same. It was a great way to understand the flow of a concept through ages, and that acted as a support for us to conceptualize this from a theoretical and scientific point of view.

Day 3

On the third day, our discussion was focused on how our thoughts influence our realities. We discussed how thinking certain thoughts and believing in certain things can lead to monotony for our physiological functioning. We can only bring ourselves to change our realities if we can deliberately and consciously try to foster new growing thoughts. This works in a cyclic manner. The same thoughts lead to the same behaviours, same behaviours lead to the same experiences, and lead to the same emotions, leading to the same choices and results/realities. In order to get different results, these chains need to be broken.

Day 4

On the fourth day, we moved from the functioning of thoughts towards the physiological aspect and how does the placebo affect our body's mechanism. The concept of epigenetics was something new and interesting. It was exciting to know that our bodies have the ability to change neural wirings to select new genes and thus a new reality. We discussed that we as humans are not doomed to a particular genetic outcome or a particular destiny, but we have the power to create new realities. Relevant stories also backed this up.

Day 5

This session acted as a grounding session for us to consolidate our learnings and knowledge. This clubbed what we had discussed in the previous two chapters and made us reflect on that. It also provided sturdy support to our discussions and knowledge by supporting it with a scientific background and real-life stories. It took the previous thread forward to make us question if we can change our environment ahead of time by changing our thoughts and generating new genes for a new reality.

Day 6

On this day, we discussed suggestibility or conditioning. It dwelled deeper into the realms and working of our subconscious minds and how suggestible it actually is. This provided us with a stronger understanding of the placebo, as a placebo is an essentiality a functioning of our subconscious minds. We discussed how our analytical mind could seem so cluttered and noisy at times, and it is only by bringing it to rest, we are able to be more mindful and get in touch with our subconscious mind. This is an effective way to make ourselves conditioned towards particular type of thinking and behaviours.

Day 7

Extending the concept of unconsciousness, we moved on to see how our beliefs are formed by unconscious habits, dreams, and repetitions. Our actions are grounded strongly in our beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. We discussed how we tend to keep repeating certain habits and activities because of some predominant beliefs we might have fostered. The perceptions and attitudes have an influence on how we perceive our situations, how we make decisions, and very interestingly, we also highly get affected by the perceptions people have about us. This tends to affect our performance as well. We also touched briefly upon mental imagery and how we need to have a clear intention combined with an elevated feeling to alter our beliefs and create better choices and a desirable reality.

Day 8

This session diverted from the discussions on physiology and instead shifted to see the topic from the lens of physics. We went over the basic principles of quantum physics and in what ways it materializes when dovetailed with spirituality. There are an infinite number of possibilities for each event in the quantum space, and as observer effect would agree, we manifest that possibility on which we direct our energy. Considering that every aspect of a situation vibrates on a specific frequency, we can bring that situation into existence by thinking on the level of the same frequency.

Day 9

We devoted this session to the discussion on few real-life case studies. It was an opportunity for the participants to finally link the learnings to these case studies to be able to make that connection. We heard the story of a person who had a rare genetic disorder, and how she was able to use a placebo and finally heal herself. We have mirror neurons that tend to mimic the actions and feelings of others. This discussion helped us condition ourselves to start believing about placebo from a more doable and pragmatic lens. We did share a few examples of people from our lives to whom we could relate them to be using the placebo.

Day 10

This was an extension of the previous one. We discussed an anecdote that further strengthened our understanding of working on this process and, more importantly, how these can be applied. One of the vital outcomes from this discussion was that the placebo or these self-healing cases are not merely miracles but a skill that can be learned, taught and passed on to others. It's very much like any other skill that we acquire. All we need is to keep our minds and thoughts open to new experiences to be able to unleash the potential within.

Day 11

This was an experiential session where we did a meditation for about 50 minutes. This was preceded by exposure to basic techniques and preparations to be made for meditation. This session was about applying what we have been gaining through the past 10 days and just letting the learning be absorbed in that space with like-minded people.

Day 12

This, too, was an extension to the previous session. We went through the steps of meditation in a detailed fashion which could help us guide through practice if we were to continue this. A meditation followed it for 15 minutes. It helped in softly bringing closure to the session.

These sessions acted as a grounding and conditioning platform that aimed to create a safe space to bring to the table essential topics for our well-being. Diversity was one of the most attractive aspects of the group as it gathered varied thought processes, beliefs, practices, and values to a united place for everyone just to reflect and learn. It has helped in gaining momentum towards a particular kind of approach and thought process, so if not anything humongous, it has been a small step and a step enough to make us ponder deeply over our everyday choices.

Feedback

Feedback from a couple of participants is given below.

"When I enrolled myself for this Study Group, I had very limited knowledge on the subject ... It was the intrigue and curiosity that led me to join the group. The group, though small, comprised of individuals who were serious to understand how the concept of - mind over body works. ... While the theory is sometimes a bit difficult to grasp, it is the true life examples which help you in understanding the concept. As we ... proceeded,... the principle behind the change and healing in the body that can be brought about by meditation and affirmations becomes more evident. The subsequent discussion amongst the participants allowed you to clarify the doubts that arose in the mind. It is truly a breakthrough in the possible cure of life threatening diseases and mental illnesses, in conjunction with regular treatment.

I must thank both Mr, Tarun Kumar and Ms. Arushi Srivastava for planning and conducting the 12 day session flawlessly. It will be my privilege to attend any such sessions which may be held in future on such self-help topics."

S. RAM MOHAN

Retired senior corporate executive

"The ... sessions ... began as an exercise in curiosity and became a journey of discovery. I already knew the science behind how placebos work. However , the astonishing power of our unconscious beliefs was teased out in detail ... The group ... discussion made a lot of difference to how we understood and retained the science and practice of meditation to create new , healing beliefs. Thank you to Tarun Kumar of AZIMVTH Ashram, and to Arushi, for the concept and process. I ended with more commitment and respect for the power of meditation, and for creating our own self- healing and self - affirming beliefs."

VANDANA BAHL

A medical doctor practising in the Middle East.