

# Therapeutic Ritual Healing, Placebo and Biofield: Human biofield activation via therapeutic ritual as the mechanism of action for the placebo response

By Marie Grace Brook

Based on: Brook, M. G. & Fauver, R. (2014). A possible mechanism of action for the placebo response: Human biofield activation via therapeutic ritual. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 33(1), 131-147.  
with special acknowledgment to Glenn Hartelius

**Placebo:** intervention with no active drug ingredients; used for control treatments in medical research

- sugar pill
- sham surgery

**Nexus: Harvard Medical School Program in Placebo Studies (PiPS) and Therapeutic Encounter**

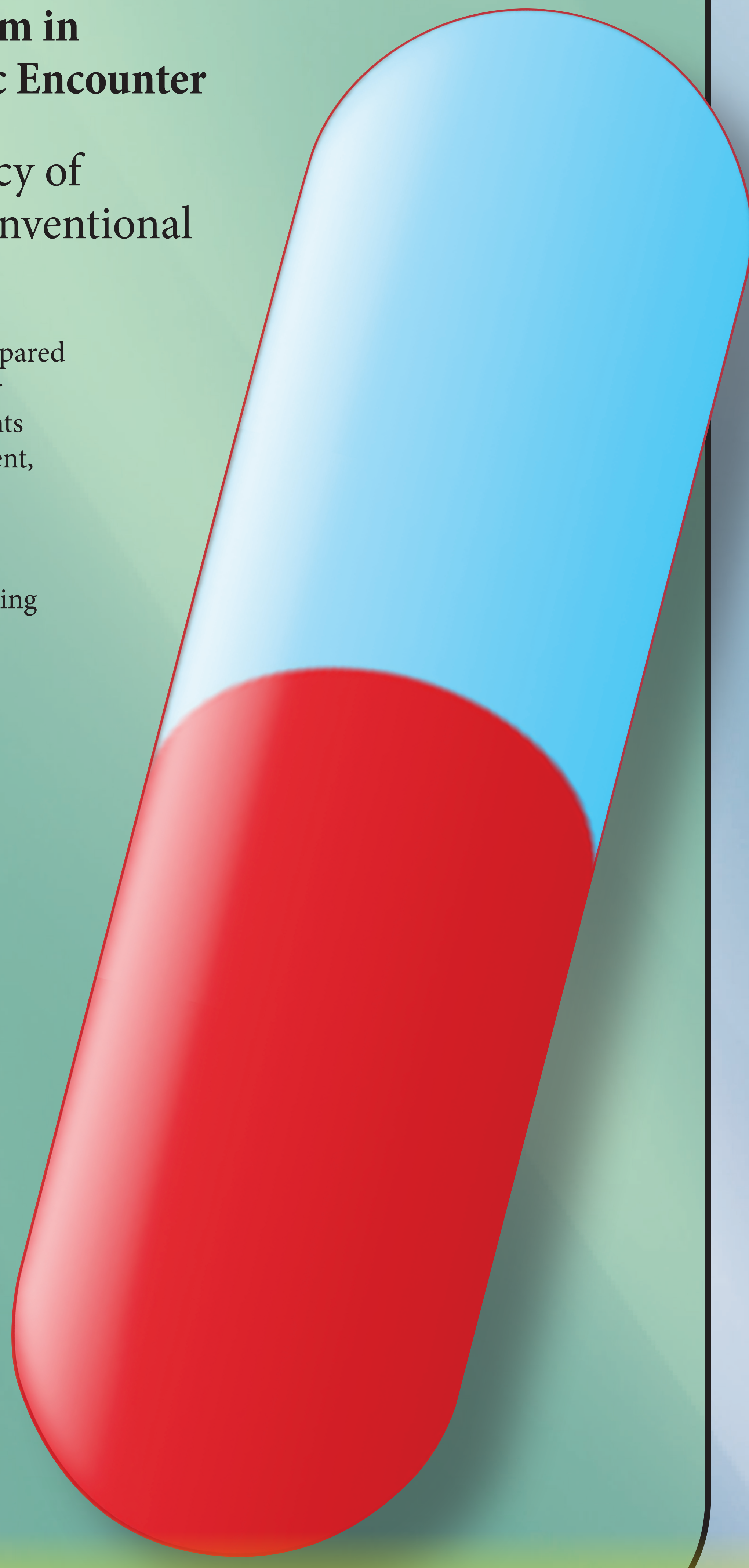
Empirical studies demonstrating efficacy of placebo treatment in comparison to conventional medicine:

Cherkin et al. (2009) carried out a randomized trial that compared simulated acupuncture (placebo), and conventional care for chronic low back pain. At one year follow-up, 50% of patients receiving conventional care showed meaningful improvement, 59% in the placebo group.

Simpson et al. (2006) evaluated all placebo-controlled drug treatment studies found on eight medical data bases, including more than 46,000 patients treated for heart disease, HIV, diabetes, and other conditions. High compliance in either conventional treatment or in placebo treatment predicted 50% less chance of mortality. Mortality rates were slightly less for placebo participants than conventionally treated participants.

Hróbjartsson & Gotzsche (2010) published a meta analysis in the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* which showed evidence to support use of placebo as effective treatment for pain.

Even when people know they are given placebos, their health improves (Kaptchuk et al., 2010).



**Therapeutic Ritual Healing:** (psychology and anthropology) therapeutic ritual leading to healing of illness or recovery from pain with no scientifically understood reason for clinical effectiveness

- Hands-on-healing
- Reiki
- Therapeutic Touch
- Guided imagery
- Traditional indigenous healing
- Acupuncture
- QiGong
- Shiatsu
- Shamanic ritual
- Chinese Medicine
- Arurvedic Medicine

**Nexus: National Institute of Health (NIH) National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH)**

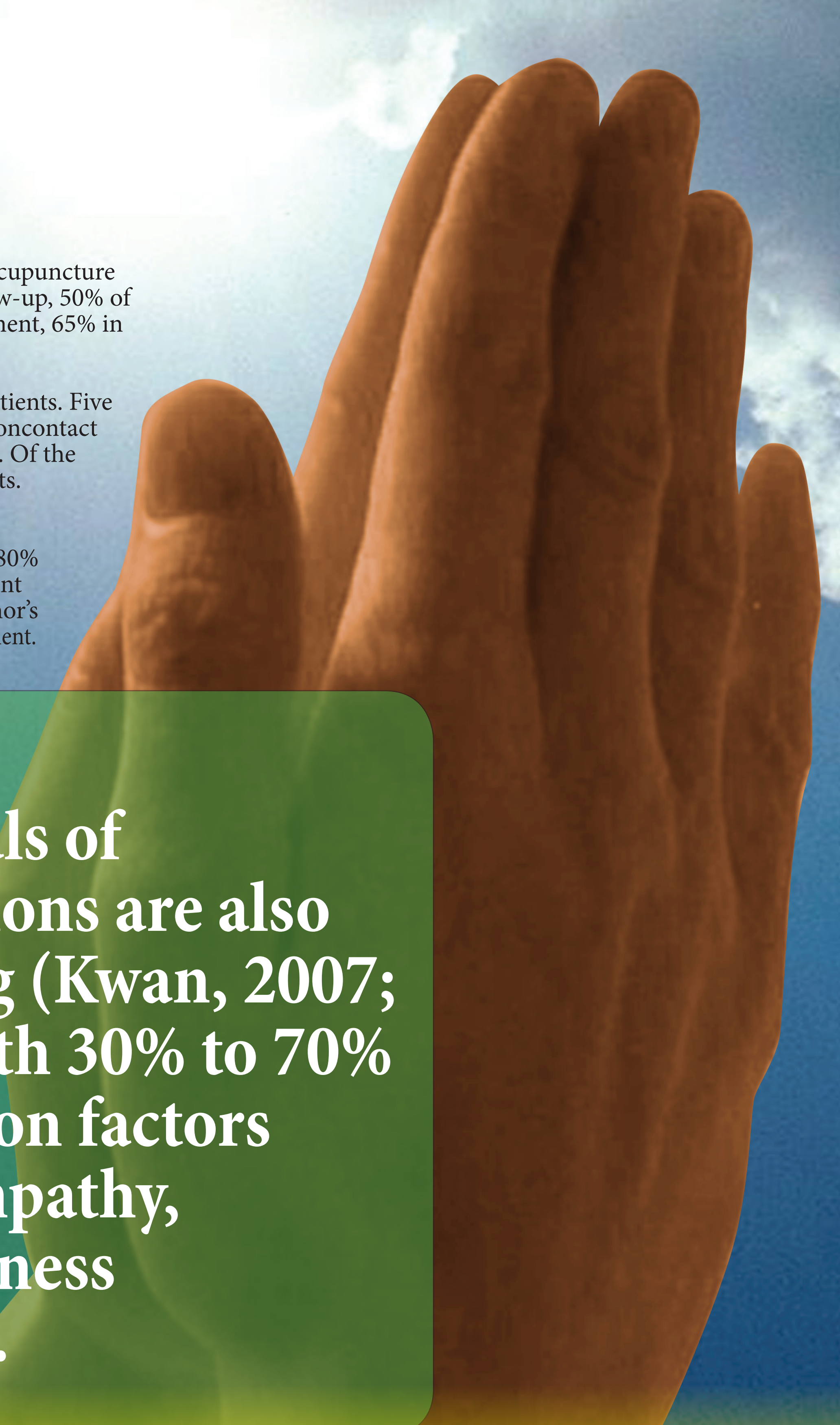
Empirical studies demonstrating efficacy of therapeutic ritual healing in comparison to conventional medicine treatment:

Cherkin et al. (2009) performed a randomized trial that compared acupuncture and conventional care for chronic low back pain. At one year follow-up, 50% of patients receiving conventional care showed meaningful improvement, 65% in the therapeutic ritual (acupuncture) group.

Astin, Harkness, & Ernst (2000) analyzed 23 trials involving 2774 patients. Five examined prayer as the distant healing intervention, 11 assessed noncontact Therapeutic Touch, and 7 examined other forms of distant healing. Of the 23 studies, 13 (57%) yielded statistically significant treatment effects.

Mehl-Madrona (1999) treated 116 patients with chronic illness in conjunction with traditional Native American healers. More than 80% of patients showed significant, persistent benefits from the treatment program. A comparison group consisting of patients from the author's emergency room practice had significantly lower rates of improvement.

Psychotherapeutic and psychiatric/medical rituals of practitioner/patient sessions are also therapeutic ritual healing (Kwan, 2007; Wampold et al., 2007) with 30% to 70% of outcome due to common factors such as collaboration, empathy, affirmation, and genuineness (Imal & Wampold, 2008).

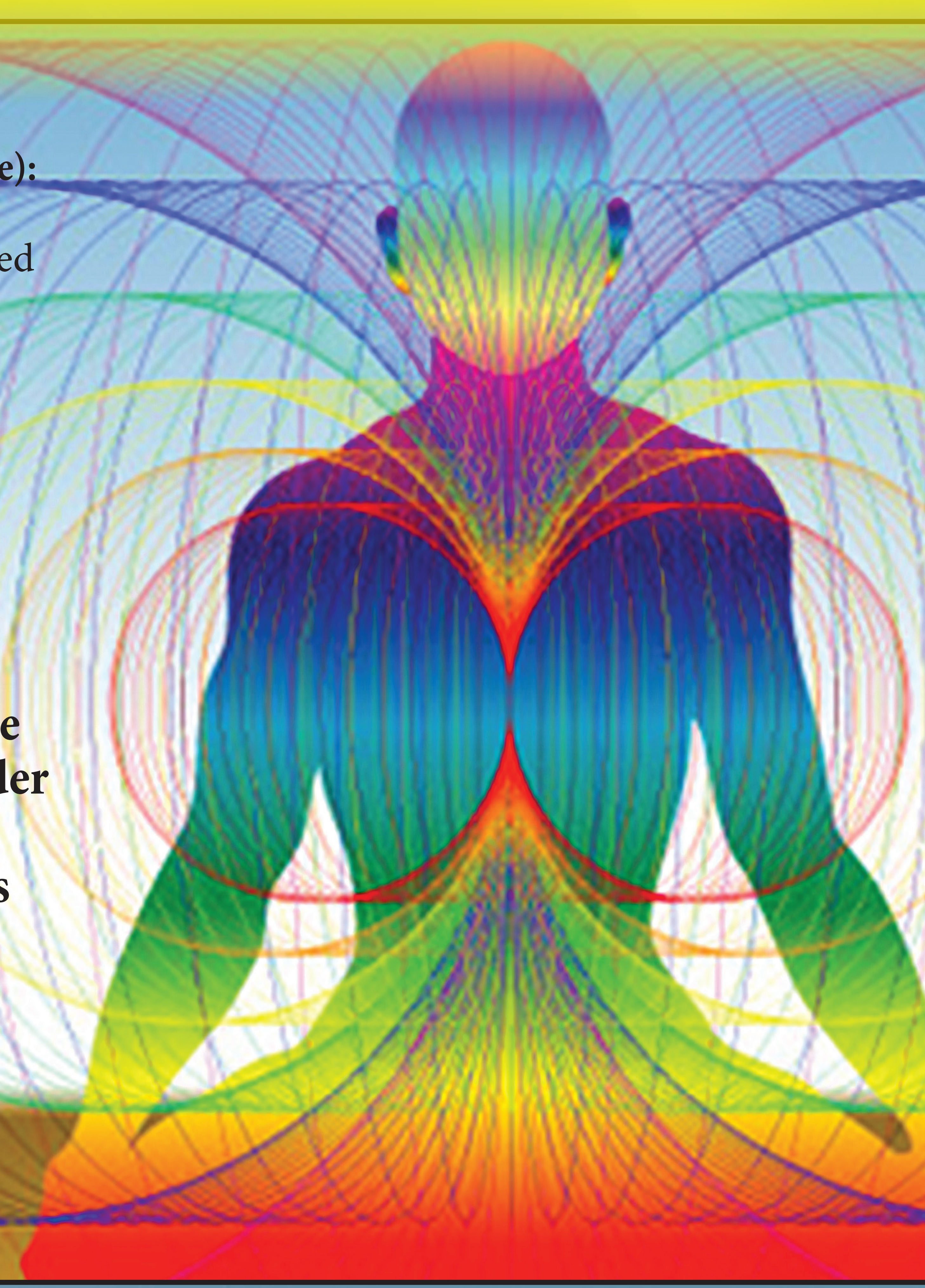


**Biofield** (biophysics and neuroscience): electromagnetic field that permeates and surrounds living organisms; biologically produced subtle energy field that provides regulatory and communication functions within the human organism

- aura energy
- chakra system
- life force
- chi ki prana
- subtle energy

**Nexus: Samuelli Institute in Alexandria, VA.**

We are now in the process of revising the past century's biochemical concept, under which all major life processes are chemical in nature, to one that proposes that such processes are electromagnetic in nature" (Becker, 2004, p. 17).



**Studies defending/describing existence of a human biofield:**

(Rubik, 2002) Biofield was defined by a panel of American National Institute of Health scientists in 1994 as "a complex, extremely weak electromagnetic field of the organism hypothesized to involve electromagnetic bioinformation for regulating homeodynamics" (p. 703).

(Rein, 2004) The Quantum Biology Research Lab expanded the biofield definition to include responsiveness to non-local healing treatment modalities that can trigger the body's innate self-healing mechanisms, in which "bioinformation, mediated by consciousness, functions globally at the quantum level to supply coherence, phase, spin, and pattern information to regulate and heal all physiologic processes" (p. 59).

(McCraty et al., 2005) At the Institute of Heartmath, inquiry is being done into the role of the heart's electrical waves in the biofield, which have an amplitude about 60 times larger than those produced by the brain. The heart's magnetic field is about 5,000 times stronger than the brain's, making it the body's most potent source of electromagnetic information.

(Popp, 2008) Scientists at the International Institute of Biophysics in Germany applied biophoton research to biofield study: "Biological regulation takes place by electromagnetic interaction within the cells (visible biophoton regime), between cells (infrared biophotons), between organs (radio wave biophotons) and between macroscopic parts of the whole system (ELF-waves)" (p. 381).

CONSCIOUS

SUBCONSCIOUS

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