

The Scientific Aspects of Prayer

It is natural for us to promise or offer to pray for someone who suffers from sickness. So many people believe in the power of prayer that it has now caught the attention of scientists and doctors. Today most hospitals and nursing homes are building prayer rooms for their patients, based on the principle that a relaxed mind is a creative mind. During prayer, a person is in touch with the consciousness, and is able to take correct decisions. Most doctors even write on their prescriptions "I treat He cures".

Medically it has been proved that the subconscious mind of an unconscious person is listening. Any prayer therefore would be captured by the patient building inner confidence and faith to fight terminal sickness. We have seen the classical example of the effect of mass prayer on a person's health in the case of Amitabh Bachchan's illness.

"Praying for health is one of the most common complementary treatments people do on their own," said Dr Harold G Koenig, co-director of the Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health at Duke University Medical Center.

About 90% of Americans and almost 100% Indians pray at some point in their lives, and when they're under stress, such as when they're sick, they're even more likely to pray.

More than one-third of the people surveyed in a recent study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* said they often turned to prayer when faced with medical concerns. In a poll involving more than 2,000 Americans, 75% of those who prayed said they prayed for wellness, while 22% said they prayed for specific medical conditions.

Numerous random studies have been conducted on this subject. In one such study, neither the patients nor the health care providers had any idea who was being prayed for. The coronary care unit patients didn't even

know there was a study being conducted. And, those praying for the patients had never even met them. The result: while those in the prayer group had about the same length of hospital stay, their overall health was slightly better than the group that didn't receive special prayers.

"Prayer may be an effective adjunct to standard medical care," wrote the authors of this 1999 study, also published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*. However, a more recent trial from the April 2006 issue of the *American Heart Journal* suggests that it's even possible for some harm to come from prayer. In this study, which included 1,800 people scheduled for heart surgery, the group who knew they were receiving prayers developed more complications from the procedure, compared to those who had not been a focus of prayer.

Many patients are reluctant and do not discuss this subject with their doctors. Only 11% patients mention prayer to their doctors. But, doctors are more open to the subject than the patients realize, particularly in serious medical situations. In a study of doctors' attitudes toward prayer and spiritual behavior, almost 85% of the doctors thought they should be aware of their patients' spiritual beliefs. Most doctors said they wouldn't pray with their patients even if they were dying, unless the patient specifically asked the doctor to pray with them. In that case, 77% of the doctors were willing to pray for their patient.

Most people are convinced that prayer helps. Some people are 'foxhole religious' types and prayer is almost a reaction or cry to the Universe for help. However, many people do it because they've experienced benefit from it in the past.

If a patient wants to pray and feels it might be helpful, there's no reason he should not. If he believes that prayer might work, then he should use it.

