

Feature Article: JAH025

HEALING TOUCH: TROUBLE WITH ANGELS

by Sharon Fish Mooney

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SYNOPSIS

Nontraditional health-related practices that involve the hands, based on the assumption that people are energy fields, are becoming increasingly popular.

One of the most widely used is Healing Touch, a practice rooted in a variety of belief systems, including Theosophy, spiritism, and Buddhism. Nurses and others certified as Healing Touch practitioners are expected to read a wide range of books on occult philosophy and engage in experiential training that includes information on contacting and channeling “angels” or “spiritual guides.” Healing Touch and related practices such as Therapeutic Touch and Reiki are being welcomed into Christian churches uncritically in the guise of Christian healing practices, based on the belief that the healing associated with them is the same form of healing practiced by Jesus and the first-century Christians. These churches appear to be ignoring biblical injunctions that warn the people of God to have nothing to do with aberrant belief systems, mediums, and with any practices associated with divination.

Elisabeth Jensen is a registered nurse and a qualified mid-wife. She has many qualifications in complementary healing methods: she is a Therapeutic Touch Teacher; Melchizedek Method Facilitator; Past, Parallel, and Future Lives Therapist; Certified Angel Intuitive Practitioner; Professional Crystal Healer; Aura Reading and Healing Therapist, and Healing Touch Practitioner. According to her Web site, Jensen is a member of the Australian Foundation for Healing Touch and the Nurse Healers-Professional Associates International.¹ She claims that the goddess Isis guided her to Egypt, communicated with her in the Queens Chamber of the Great Pyramid, and continues to give her direct guidance. Following this mystical experience, Jensen established the Isis Mystery School to teach Goddess Divination, Ancient Egyptian Divination, Isis Divine Alchemy, and Isis Lotus Healing.²

Jensen is just one of many nurses who also describe themselves with such titles as Past Life Regression Therapists, Reiki Masters, Certified Hypnotists, and Certified Angel Therapy Practitioners. In addition to holistic healing, private therapy, and activities noted above, they engage in such practices as angel readings (psychic readings in thin disguise) and other types of “angel care.”³ Some of the nurses who are flirting with techniques such as Therapeutic Touch or Healing Touch are Christians. Many of the nurses with experience in this arena are available for presentations, training workshops, and healing seminars in recreation centers, public libraries, workplaces—and even your neighborhood church.

AN ENERGY-BASED APPROACH TO HEALING

The Level I Healing Touch workshop, sponsored by the local district of the American Nurses Association, began with teaching on Therapeutic Touch, an extremely popular noncontact (despite the name) nursing

intervention. The technique was developed by Dora [van Gelder] Kunz (1904–1999), then president of the Theosophical Society of America, and Dolores Krieger, R.N., Ph.D., a Buddhist and a professor of nursing at New York University.⁴ Books for sale included titles such as *Vibrational Medicine*,⁵ which is described as “a bridge between the metaphysical and medical communities”;⁶ *The Women’s Spirituality Book*,⁷ which focuses on the reclamation of goddess religion for inner development; and *The Crystal Stair: A Guide to the Ascension*, which includes the secondary subtitle *Channeled Messages from Sananda (Jesus), Ashtar, Archangel Michael, and St. Germain*.⁸

Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry is described in a program brochure as “a continuing education program for parish nurses, ministers in parish ministries, chaplains and nurses in hospitals, nursing homes and hospices, and the lay community seeking to explore a spiritual healing ministry involving the laying-on of hands and other Healing Touch techniques.”⁹ A 2004 issue of the *Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry Newsletter* indicates that the educational focus in ministry settings includes “prayer, energetic healing and anointing with essential oils”; all three are considered forms of “vibrational healing” that “formed a foundational stone and marked the success of the early Christian community.”¹⁰ Continuing education units for workshops throughout the United States are granted through the Colorado Center for Healing Touch; the program is an approved provider of continuing education by the Colorado Nurses’ Association and the California Board of Registered Nursing. The Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry is also approved to grant Continuing Chaplaincy Education units by the Association of Professional Chaplains.¹¹

According to their official ministry Web site, the program has “an energy-based therapeutic approach to health and healing that includes the practice of many modern-day Christian healers.”¹² The ministry states that its “deeper roots...go back to the prayer, the laying-on of hands and anointing with oil modeled by Jesus as a major part of his ministry,”¹³ but its actual contemporary beginnings are rooted in the Healing Touch program begun in the early 1980s. A suggested reading list includes a few good books on healing that should be in church libraries.¹⁴ The majority of books recommended, however, contain content more suitable for metaphysical bookstores, including Doreen Virtue’s *Healing with the Angels: How the Angels Can Assist You in Every Area of Your Life*,¹⁵ Rosalyn Bruyere’s *Wheels of Light: A Study of the Chakras, volume 1*,¹⁶ and Barbara Brennan’s *Hands of Light: A Guide to Healing through the Human Energy Field*.¹⁷ Much of the core teaching on Healing Touch is based on the writing of Bruyere and Brennan.

THE OCCULT CONNECTION

Doreen Virtue, a “spiritual clairvoyant” with a Ph.D. in counseling psychology, claims that she was able, as a child, to communicate with “invisible friends” who were really “angels and deceased loved ones.” Now Virtue lectures on angel therapy, spiritual healing, mediumship, reincarnation, and channeling. A primary target audience for Virtue’s workshops is the registered professional nurse.¹⁸

The Reverend Rosalyn Bruyere, founder and director of the Healing Light Center Church in Sierra Madre, California, considers herself a clairvoyant, healer, and medicine woman.¹⁹ Bruyere’s *Wheels of Light* is a compendium of occult philosophy with a heavy focus on the rising and awakening of *kundalini* energy, also known as “serpent energy.” Bruyere notes that “every culture of antiquity with the exception of Christians” revered the symbol of the serpent. Her studies of goddess religion led her to discover the snake as “the power of the undulate” or as a “feminine power” associated with healing, renewal, physical and spiritual well-being, and enlightenment, rather than with deceit and corruption as depicted in the Genesis account.²⁰

Barbara Brennan, founder of the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, lists among her credentials a Ph.D. in Energy Medicine from Greenwich University, Norfolk, Australia, and a Th.D. (Doctorate of Theology) in Healing from Holos University, Springfield, Missouri.²¹ Holos University Graduate Seminary is the official postgraduate school of the International Science of Mind Church for Spiritual Healing.²² Brennan’s school, located in South Florida, grants a Bachelor of Science in Brennan Healing Science and a diploma in Brennan Healing Science for studies related to hands-on energy healing and personal transformation.²³

In *Light Emerging*, Brennan offers pages of channeled messages from Heyoan, her spiritual guide.²⁴ In *Hands of Light*, Brennan tells readers that the name *Heyoan* means “The Wind Whispering Truth Through

The Centuries.” Included in her book are exercises for the steps involved in contacting one’s own spirit guides; “understanding that you are one with God” is first in the process.²⁵ Brennan’s Healing Science Web site offers weekly channeled messages. She also regularly channels messages from Heyoan to students enrolled in her school, many of whom are associated with the health professions.

ENERGY HEALING WITH ANGEL AND SPIRIT GUIDES

The foregoing illustrations offer but a glimpse of what has become a significant movement called Energy Medicine or Energy Healing. The incorporation of “spirit guides” or “angel guides” and training on how to channel them has become an increasingly common practice for nurses who attend advanced Healing Touch workshops, and, more recently, advanced “invitation only” Therapeutic Touch workshops. Approved by the New York State Nurses Association Council on Continuing Education, nurses at these latter workshops are taught to work with “other-than-human intelligences.”²⁶

The Spiritual Dimension of Therapeutic Touch,²⁷ published in 2004, is based largely on Dora Kunz’s workshops that were held at East and West coast Theosophical retreat centers. Included in the book is reference material from *The Real World of Fairies*, one of her early writings.²⁸ This new emphasis in Therapeutic Touch training may well be an effort to capitalize on the popularity of spirit guide communication that has long been a feature of Healing Touch. Healing Touch as a movement appears to be vying for the allegiance of nurses worldwide, eclipsing the popularity of Therapeutic Touch and, with the proliferation of Healing Touch books and workshops, gaining a significant market share. Krieger has spoken disparagingly about Healing Touch,²⁹ even though the two modalities are similar in practice and are both rooted conceptually in the Western occultism of Theosophy, spiritism,³⁰ and the Eastern belief system of Buddhism.

Kunz references the writings of early-twentieth-century Theosophist Charles W. Leadbeater as primary source material for her explanations of the mechanisms underlying energy healing. Leadbeater (1847–1934), a clairvoyant, was a curate in the Church of England who converted to Buddhism. His influence on future generations of Theosophists and on the development of contemporary energy-based practices was enormous.³¹ Two of his books, *The Chakras*, and *Man, Visible and Invisible*, provided the conceptual framework for Kunz’s foundational writings for nursing.³² Energy, generally defined as *prana* or *chi*, is believed to flow through, and can be transformed by, *chakras*, a Sanskrit word meaning “circle or wheel.” Some of these *chakras* are located in the hands where they are centers of activity for the “reception, assimilation, and transmission of life energies.”³³ Another primary reference used by both nursing movements is *The Chakras and the Human Energy Field*,³⁴ a more contemporary Theosophical publication.

Therapeutic Touch involves four primary steps: (1) centering meditatively, (2) assessing the patient’s supposed energy field, (3) unruffling or decongesting energy, and (4) modulating using the mind or intentionality to redistribute energy through the hand *chakras*.³⁵

In contrast, more than 30 techniques for rebalancing energy are taught in the Healing Touch program in a series of three workshops, though the initial teaching is very similar to that of Therapeutic Touch.³⁶ Janet Mentgen, a registered nurse with a bachelor’s degree, was introduced to Therapeutic Touch in a workshop in 1980, then went on to practice various forms of “energy-based medicine” in the Denver, Colorado, area, eventually combining a number of them into the practice of Healing Touch. The American Holistic Nurses’ Association began offering Healing Touch in 1990, and officially certified it in 1993. In 1993 Mentgen formed the Colorado Center for Healing Touch. By then, Healing Touch had grown from a modality into a movement. Healing Touch International, soon incorporated by the Colorado Center for Healing Touch, became the certifying authority for Healing Touch and promoted its growth worldwide, including a five-level educational program ranging from beginner to advanced levels. A student who attends all levels of the program can apply to become a Certified Healing Touch Practitioner.³⁷

One example of the practices taught in the Level III workshop is Etheric Template Clearing, or removing negative energy patterns. Brennan describes the etheric template as the fifth layer of the *aura*;³⁸ the aura has been described as the field of energy that surrounds and interpenetrates the physical body.³⁹ Actual healing of the etheric template can involve “spiritual guides” performing “etheric operations” through the

hands of a Healing Touch practitioner. Brennan notes that it is the guides who control everything that goes on; the healer is “largely passive.”⁴⁰ In order to access or be responsive to these guides, the healer must develop Higher Sense Perception (HSP) by expanding his or her senses beyond normal ranges. Examples of HSP include clairaudience, clairvoyance, and clairsentience.⁴¹ Brennan includes exercises for developing each in *Hands of Light*. In *Light Emerging* she more fully explores HSP, noting that another aspect of it is perceiving spiritual guides or guardian angels. She adds that she could tell the difference between the two in her own experience because, unlike the angels, the spiritual guides “didn’t have wings.”⁴²

Celestial Level Healing, related to the sixth layer of the auric field, is another technique taught at more advanced Healing Touch workshops; it is considered a type of channeling. A drawing in *Hands of Light* depicts a healer sitting at the head of a table, eyes closed, and hands hovering several inches from a patient’s head; angels surround the healer and patient.⁴³ Brennan discusses the need for healers to learn to “raise their vibrations” in order to accept a “greater reality.” This makes it easier, Brennan wrote, for “the guides to get concepts through to you because you are not so prejudiced about the nature of the world; i.e., you have removed some of the blocks from your brain.”⁴⁴

Jill Dickson, R.N., described her experience of attending one of Mentgen’s three-day Healing Touch workshops:

The second day was as amazing as the first. We learned many more energetic techniques with Janet, including the powerful Lymphatic Drainage sequence—a form of energetic release used to help relieve congestion and pain in the lymph system. I also spent time learning from my Healing Touch colleagues....Several people were repeating this course for the third and even fourth time because of their love of Healing Touch. There were hospital nurses from all disciplines, massage therapists, ministers, and psychologists, even someone who had worked as a high executive with a pharmaceutical industry. We shared stories of how Healing Touch had entered our lives, and how it had profoundly impacted our lives and our practices. We laughed, we cried, and we healed. I slept soundly that night. Janet had taught us how to introduce spirit guides into our work, and as I slept, I felt enveloped by the love of my colleagues and my spirit guides.⁴⁵

Workshop Levels IV and V prepare students to become Certified Healing Touch Practitioners. At these levels, each student is assigned a mentor. Students also are required to conduct and document 100 Healing Touch sessions, and to experience at least 10 additional alternative healing techniques; Reiki is one of the most popular and it is not unusual to find nurses who are certified in both Healing Touch and Reiki.⁴⁶ Many of these nurses will engage in private practice; these workshop levels therefore include information about establishing a business and integrating various healing techniques into health-care programs.

Healing Touch, in particular, has been making significant inroads into churches of all denominations in the guise of a “Christian healing modality.” It has been doing so primarily with aggressive promotion by the Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry. Parish nursing also may be a vehicle for incorporating Healing Touch and related therapies into churches, often through the avenue of a church health fair, although the premises, assumptions, and foundations of basic parish nurse training are generally sound and based on a biblical understanding of health and healing (see sidebar for a description of this important movement).

AVENUES OF LEGITIMACY

Alternative healing modalities of all types blossomed in the 1970s in the wake of the 1960s counterculture. The importing of Hinduism and Buddhism introduced Americans to meditation techniques such as Transcendental Meditation (TM) and yoga. TM, yoga, and many other alternative approaches to spirituality and health rooted in Eastern metaphysical systems of thought became more firmly established in the culture at large in the 1980s. They also began appearing regularly in professional journals, described as techniques that lowered stress and blood pressure. They gained more legitimacy in medicine through the establishment in 1993 of the Office of Alternative Medicine by the National Institutes of Health; one purpose of the Office of Alternative Medicine was to encourage research and exploration of the effectiveness of these alternative healing techniques.

TM, yoga, and Therapeutic Touch gained legitimacy in nursing schools in the 1970s and 1980s, largely promoted by national nursing organizations such as the National League for Nursing and the American Nurses Association. Many nurses have researched Therapeutic Touch as an intervention through heavily funded research projects. Healing Touch has become a more recent topic for nursing research and use in clinical settings such as hospitals, hospices, and nursing homes.⁴⁷

Developers of both Therapeutic and Healing Touch have appealed to the science of quantum physics for legitimization and substantiation of their claims, though critics have noted that the appeal has been to select interpretations of quantum physics that might be more accurately described as quantum metaphysics or quantum mysticism.⁴⁸ Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics*,⁴⁹ Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*,⁵⁰ and Deepak Chopra's *The New Physics of Healing*⁵¹ are sources frequently cited, along with the writings of physicist David Bohm (1917–1994), whose interpretations of quantum physics were heavily influenced by the metaphysical writings of Jiddu Krishnamurti.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), born in India into a moderately wealthy Brahmin (highest caste or class) family, was originally groomed by Theosophists Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater as the fifth Buddha and incarnation of Lord Bodhisattva Maitreya, the coming World Teacher who was proclaimed as “the vehicle for the reincarnation of Christ in the west and of Buddha in the East.”⁵² Krishnamurti later resigned from Besant's religious organization, the Order of the Star in the East, and renounced his claim to messianic fame, but Buddhist monistic (“all is One”) concepts continued to permeate both his individual writings and a coauthored book with Bohm.⁵³ Concepts from Buddhism, housed in various schools of Theosophy, are foundational to both Therapeutic and Healing Touch.

The writings of Alice Bailey (1880–1949) also play a major role in the Healing Touch movement. Bailey founded the Arcane School (which was rooted in Theosophy, but then branched out into many teachings that differed from it). Her supposedly channeled book, *Esoteric Healing*,⁵⁴ is a primary source textbook for the Healing Touch practitioner. Bailey claimed that she was the amanuensis, or scribe, of Djwhal Khul, a Tibetan adept and ascended Master of the White Brotherhood.⁵⁵ In *Initiation, Human and Solar*, Bailey described her “teacher” (one assumes she was referring to Djwhal Khul) as an adept who “works largely, too, with certain groups of the devas of the ethers, who are the healing devas, and who thus collaborate with Him in the work of healing some of the physical ills of humanity.”⁵⁶

HEALING TOUCH AND THE CHURCH

The standard teaching of the Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry is that the contemporary Christian church has lost its original focus on healing and needs to reclaim it. There is, it could be argued, some validity to this assessment, though there has been a renewed focus on healing in many Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches since the early 1970s in particular, sparked by books reflecting various denominational perspectives.⁵⁷ Healing has long been a focus in churches reflecting Pentecostal or charismatic traditions. There is also a rich historic tradition of books on healing by missionaries and ministers such as Andrew Murray (1828–1917), author of *Divine Healing*, and Christian and Missionary Alliance founder A. B. Simpson (1843–1919), author of *The Gospel of Healing*. The parish nurse movement is one of the most visible and recent expressions of a holistic healing focus influencing churches of all denominations.

If this rich historic and contemporary tradition is the case, why, then, does a practice such as Healing Touch appeal to so many within the church? How is it possible that a practice so clearly rooted in Western occultism and esotericism, Eastern metaphysical beliefs, and even spiritism, can be considered compatible with a Christian worldview or even be allowed in a church in the first place?

Some answers to the foregoing questions are found in what Healing Touch claims to offer and what it may deliver to the practitioner; this includes an emotionally satisfying experience couched in the context of an appealing ritual. Healing Touch is highly aesthetic and highly ritualistic, from the initial step of meditative centering, to the patterned series of hand movements believed to assess, unruffle, and modulate or even flick away “negative” energy. The practice seems designed to meet a human need for a sense of order, beauty, and balance. In nursing literature, practices such as Therapeutic and Healing Touch are, in fact, frequently referred to as healing rituals evoking “art, beauty and soul care.”⁵⁸

Rituals *are* powerful tools, engendering strong emotional responses as well as experiences that may or may not be accurately interpreted as spiritual. The Old and New Testament Scriptures are replete with examples of rituals God commanded His people to engage in, including rituals of healing (see, e.g., 2 Kings 5:13–14 and John 9:7). The primary purpose of these healing rituals, however, invariably led to restoration of physical, emotional, social, mental, and spiritual health. A radical repentance was also foundational to the practice of much healing in Scripture, accompanied by recognition of one’s humanness and total dependence on God as opposed to a belief in one’s innate divinity (see 2 Kings 20; Num. 21; James 5:13–16). The most powerful healing ritual of all for Christians was, in reality, the Roman ritual of crucifixion. Isaiah 53:5 tells us, “With His stripes we are healed” (ESV), we are not merely rebalanced.

True biblical healing on any level really is a “power encounter.” The power encountered is God. In many cases, however, there is a lack of discernment or recognition of other powers or of spiritual realms of existence that are considered “off-limits” to Christians. There is power in these realms too, though power of a different nature. Angels, including fallen ones, really do exist, but are not ours to invoke, conjure, or channel. The consequences for accessing angels, and for attempting to access deceased humans as well, can be quite severe, as Saul found out when he attempted to channel Samuel’s spirit through a medium (see 1 Sam. 28:3–19). God forbids it (see also Lev. 19:31 and Deut. 18:9–14).

Healing practices that appeal to extrabiblical sources of authority appear to have a particularly strong appeal to the senses. A pastor from Sackville, Nova Scotia, Canada, who wrote about introducing Therapeutic Touch in his church immediately after the communion service, noted that some of the congregants who remained at the altar to receive the laying-on of hands experienced “tingling, heat,” and “seeing light.”⁵⁹ Physical sensations such as these may be legitimate responses to the traditional Christian experience of the laying-on of hands and prayer, but the focus of true Christian healing is not on feelings and experiences but on God, who bids us to come to Him in our brokenness.

There is another side to many energy-based healing techniques, including dangers accompanying the raising of one’s own or another’s “kundalini energy.” Explanations of these dangers vary greatly. Training on handling “psychospiritual crises” is now included in more advanced Therapeutic Touch workshops.⁶⁰ Christians would be wise not to subject themselves to experiences or practices that specifically are designed to awaken or manipulate energy in any form.⁶¹

Practices such as Healing Touch are also self validating; that is, they fall into the category of subjectively validated as opposed to objectively validated experiences. Whereas the former are evaluated within the context of one’s private network of feelings where the heart blindly approves, the latter are evaluated within the context of a biblical system of thought where the mind carefully appraises, *embracing* reason rather than *escaping* reason. An informed and engaged mind should make us more critical rather than less critical about the nature of this world, as well as any spiritual worlds that may not be ours safely to explore.

Healing Touch proponents have attempted to legitimize this practice to the church by promoting the idea that the type of healing Jesus engaged in was energy-based healing, consistent with new discoveries in quantum theory. To support this belief, they use, for example, the healing by Jesus of the woman with the issue of blood. Mark 5:27 describes her touching the garment of Jesus from behind. In response to her touch, power immediately came out of Jesus and the woman was healed, instantly and completely. The source of the power to heal seems clear in this passage; it was from God, given to the Son by the Father, residing in Jesus. To equate this dynamic healing power of a personal God with the subtle and impersonal energies of prana or chi, capable of being manipulated and channeled independently by human intentionality or with the assistance of spirit guides or other-than-human intelligences, implies an equivalence that simply does not exist.

“I don’t believe we can be content with natural abilities and gifts—we have to continuously review and update our studies and methods until Energy and Angel Medicine becomes so dramatically effective and widely accepted that it becomes a natural thing to just have these treatments and readings as required,”⁶² wrote Elisabeth Jensen, the nurse mentioned at the beginning of this article who practiced a wide variety of occult and energy-based therapies, including Healing Touch. Her statement should be a wake-up call to Christians to get back to legitimate Christian prayer for healing. True Christian healing should never

be considered “natural,” but a supernatural act of grace. Those who are promoting energy-based healing in the church have made healing an autonomous act, relying on human manipulation.

Francis Schaeffer wrote about an autonomous notion of nature “eating up grace.”⁶³ When this happened historically, Schaeffer noted, philosophy “became increasingly free” and “was separated from revelation.” It “began to take wings, as it were, and fly off wherever it wished, without relationship to the Scriptures.”⁶⁴ The greatest need of the church in relation to a renewed and restored focus on healing is to let our philosophies of healing and our practices of healing be fully informed by the Scriptures and by the God of history who desires to teach us to heal and to be healed only through His power. That is both our heritage and our hope.

NOTES

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11. See Association of Professional Chaplains, <http://www.professionalchaplains.org/education-list.asp>.
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17. Barbara Brennan, *Hands of Light: A Guide to Healing through the Human Energy Field* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).
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20. See Bruyere, *Wheels of Light*, 124–26.
21. Barbara Brennan, “Credentials,” Barbara Brennan School of Healing, http://www.barbarabrennan.com/bbsh/about_barbara/credentials1.html.
22. See Holographic University Graduate Seminary, <http://www.hugs-edu.org/>.
23. Barbara Brennan, “New Degree Program,” Barbara Brennan School of Healing, <http://www.barbarabrennan.com/bbsh/BACHELOR/BSdegreeInfo.html>.
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25. See Brennan, *Hands of Light*, 170–71.
26. See, e.g., Northeast Theosophical Retreat Center, “Workshops on Therapeutic Touch,” under “31st Annual Advanced Therapeutic Touch Workshop,” Pumpkin Hollow Farm, http://www.pumpkinhollow.org/tt_ws.html#advanced_ws.
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- Also Dora Kunz, comp., *Spiritual Aspects of the Healing Arts*. (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1985); Dora Kunz, *The Personal Aura* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books/Theosophical Publishing House, 1991).
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 39. Kunz, *The Personal Aura*.
 40. Brennan, *Hands of Light*, 219–20.
 41. *Ibid.*, 153.
 42. See Brennan, *Light Emerging*, 54.
 43. See Brennan, *Hands of Light*, 227.
 44. *Ibid.*, 226.
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