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## Do You Believe in Miracles?

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Millions of people are flocking to Abadiania, a remote town in Brazil, in search of a miracle. They come with every kind of ailment you can imagine—cancer, arthritis, depression—all to see one man: John of God.

Some believe John of God, a simple farmer with no medical degree and little education, is a medium who channels the spirits of more than 30 dead doctors and saints to bring physical and spiritual healing. Working out of a place called the Casa, a spiritual center open to all faiths, he performs

surgeries seemingly without anesthesia or sterilization. These surgeries mostly take the form of incisions, eye scrapings and nasal probes. Many who have experienced these procedures claim they feel little to no pain, and reports of infections are hard to find.

However, the majority of the healings don't involve physical contact. The Casa is also famous for its "invisible surgeries," where it's believed that the spirits are the ones doing the work. Some have even reported finding incisions on their bodies after these invisible surgeries.

People around the world have credited John of God, and the spirits that they believe work through him, with miraculous healings. Others have accused him of impropriety. Despite his detractors, those whose lives he has touched say he is a simple man with a gift. John of God charges no fees and takes no credit for what he does. He says it is the power of God working through him.



Susan Casey, the editor-in-chief of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, traveled to the Casa to experience John of God for herself. Walking into it as a neutral journalist, she says she was driven first and foremost by curiosity.

"If there is one case of healing...if there is even one instance of the thousands we've heard about, then really, what's going on?" Susan says.

On the day Susan visited, she says she saw thousands of people lined up, all hoping for a miracle.

"There's this intense sense of hope from people," Susan says. "If you've been told you don't have another chance—[if] the doctor has said, 'We can't do anything more for you'—and you come here, and you've been told this man can potentially create a miracle for you...that's some heavy stuff. I felt that and I was trying to stay very

open to it, but it often was overwhelming."

Susan witnessed some physical surgeries while she was there, including an eye scraping—a procedure where John of God uses a knife to scrape the eyeball. Susan says she watched John of God perform this surgery on a woman while she was there and, to her surprise, the woman was completely calm the entire time.

"Even if it doesn't hurt and skeptics say, 'Oh, you know, if you don't touch the cornea, it doesn't hurt.' But come on, if somebody comes at you with a knife in your eye, you're going to flinch. And there was just no flinching," Susan says.



While at the Casa, Susan was also searching for her own healing. After her father suddenly passed away two years ago, Susan experienced a "tsunami of grief" that she says she couldn't escape from. She wondered if John of God could help heal her grief.

When she first met with John of God, she says all he did was look her in the eyes. "I thought, 'That was it?' I was expecting a lightening bolt, where there's a big flash of insight. And they just said, 'Come back later.' It's basically, 'Take a blessing and come back.'"

Susan met with him a second time, and again, he didn't spend any time with her. What he did do was look at a picture of Susan and her father. He then told Susan to sit in the "healing room," a room in the Casa reserved for meditation and prayer, for three hours. Susan says she was surrounded by hundreds of people in the healing room, all of whom were praying and meditating with their eyes closed.

"Three hours went by like 20 minutes," Susan says, "and it was blissful—it was like I was floating."

In her own state of meditation, Susan says she was able to speak with her father. "It was very real," she says. "More of a vision than I had ever had before. ... I got this feeling like I shouldn't be sad, that everything was okay."

While Susan acknowledges that the whole experience sounds skeptical, she says she's "not a woo-woo person," and that the Casa helped her find healing.

"I just feel as though I saw the joy in life again," she says. "I am a very excited and curious person usually, and that had gone [after my father passed away]. And [after being at the Casa], I started sleeping less, I had more energy, I felt lighter and I felt happier."



Dr. Jeff Rediger is a psychiatrist who traveled to the Casa seven years ago as a skeptic. His goal was to collect lab reports, radiological exams and photos of people who reported that they were physically healed by John of God and to see if the healings could be documented.

Like Susan, he witnessed several physical surgeries while he was there—an experience he says changed the way he thought about the world.

"Some people who I spoke with were able to remember the events going around them completely, and some people seem to enter a sort of altered state during these surgeries," he says. "When I was assisting in one of the surgeries, [John of God] cut this woman's

cornea. She didn't flinch. She didn't try to pull away from him. I can't explain that. I heard some people use the term 'spiritual anesthesia.' I have no way to understand that."



One thing many find shocking about John of God's work is that it appears as though he's performing surgery without anesthesia or proper sterilization.

"As a physician, I have to say, you don't try these things at home or with your loved ones," he says. "These are things that I don't understand, so I can't fully endorse things that are beyond my understanding. ... I take care of people every day from surgery, and the risk of infection is typically great and something we have to take seriously."

Both Dr. Rediger and Susan say John of God is very clear that he is not against Western medicine. In fact, he urges those who come to see him to continue all treatments prescribed by their own medical doctors. Susan says that while she was at the Casa, John of God even invited doctors from around the world to come and witness his work.

"They're very careful not to ever pit themselves against the mainstream medical profession," Susan says. "He's never going to do a heart transplant up there. He's going to do whatever he can do with his ability to heal, and then you might have to go to your doctor for the rest."



Dr. Rediger says he experienced firsthand something unexplainable while in Brazil. He says he was walking down the street one day when a friend pointed out to him that he was bleeding. Dr. Rediger pulled up his shirt and found a small horizontal incision on his chest. Dr. Rediger, who does not have a bleeding disorder, says it bled for about an hour.

**Dr. Rediger:** I didn't know what to say; I didn't know how to respond. I had no idea what was going on.

**Oprah:** Because you suddenly have spontaneous bleeding and an incision that you didn't have before? Is that what you're telling us?

**Dr. Rediger:** Correct. I'd never had anything like that happen in my life. Ever. I'd been to seminary, medical school, residency in psychiatry, and nothing had prepared me to understand."

**Oprah:** Looking back, with some hindsight and perspective, do you have a medical explanation for what happened to you?

**Dr. Rediger:** I don't have a medical explanation for it. My whole life has been turned upside down in many ways. I have changed a lot.

Dr. Rediger traveled to the Casa as a skeptic, and says he still doesn't know what to believe. The one thing he says he has taken away from his experience is that nothing is as it appears to be.

"If you can say something to the effect that 'I believe this in my head, but I don't believe it with my heart, I don't get it, it's too much,' and then a little incision manifests on the skin over the area of your heart...that means none of this is what we think it is."

Whether John of God's work is a slight of hand or actually a miracle, Dr. Rediger says it's clear that the power of



faith is something that needs to be explored more.

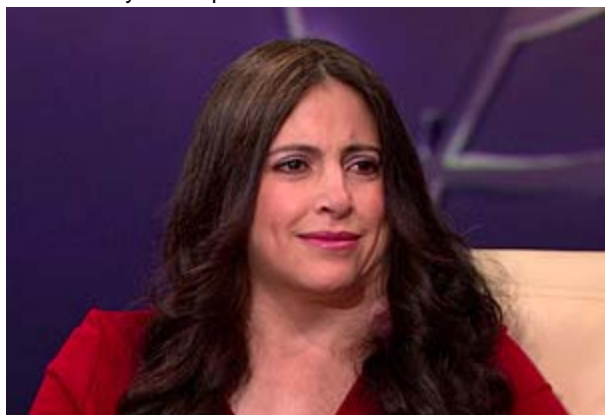
"I believe the power of belief, the power of the mind, are far more powerful than we have begun to explore," he says. "I believe that's an unexplored wilderness in terms of research."



Lisa spent most of her teen years watching her mother suffer through chemotherapy to fight breast and bone cancers. Her mother passed away when Lisa was 19. When Lisa turned 37, she got more bad news—she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Doctors recommended a double mastectomy and chemotherapy, but Lisa refused. Desperate to find an alternative treatment, she traveled from her home in South Africa to Abadiania to see John of God. While at the Casa, Lisa volunteered for a visible surgery—a nasal probe.

"My heart was beating very fast [during the surgery]. And then I sort of felt him turning this instrument, and I remember a crunching sound and thinking 'How far can this thing go back?' because it felt really far," she says. "I wouldn't say it was painful. It was more like shock."



When she left Brazil, Lisa says she followed the guidelines she had received from John of God, such as abstaining from sex and alcohol for 40 days. She later had a biopsy and, unfortunately, her tumor was still malignant.

"It's never gone away, meaning I've never been out of the cancer realm," Lisa says. "I was told I was at a fourth-stage diagnosis."

Even though Lisa did not experience a physical healing at the Casa, she says she has no regrets.

"I know that I carried the loss of my mother for years—that sadness, that feeling of being deprived of a mother," she says. "And [being at the Casa] was an uplifting, joyful, peaceful experience. It wasn't uncomfortable. There was an energy about so many people seeking help."

Ernie first went to Brazil to see John of God in 2002. He was there to support a friend but ended up experiencing a healing of his own: John of God removed an egg-size tumor from his back. Ernie says he was given no anesthesia before or during the surgery, and he felt only a minimal amount of pain.

"In the beginning, when he actually made the incision, I felt a sharp pain almost like a paper cut," Ernie says. "And then I didn't feel anything after that."

Despite the fact that the surgery was performed on a risky area (close to his spine), Ernie says he had no reservations going into it because he believed it would be a success.



Oprah Show producers spoke to Ernie's U.S. doctor, who confirmed that Ernie did, in fact, have a tumor on his back that is no longer there.

"I think you can't really explain it medically in terms of what we know," Ernie says. "But we all know about the human body being more than just flesh and blood and bones. We know it to be a form of energy."



Not everyone who goes to see John of God comes back healed. Dr. Rediger says he thinks every case is unique. For example, Ernie's tumor was removed, but Lisa still has stage 4 cancer.

"It's the journey of the soul," Dr. Rediger says. "And we all are trying to use the illness to learn something that is unique to our particular situation, I believe."

Whatever is happening at the Casa with John of God, Dr. Rediger believes it's not about the phenomena or even about the healer—it's about a shift that happens

to these people internally, spiritually or psychologically.

In terms of his own experience with John of God, Dr. Rediger says it's been life-changing. "Perhaps the real heart within us is not just a pump, he says. "Perhaps the real heart within us is about love and faith. Perhaps the physical body is not who we really are. Perhaps we are these invisible souls walking around, and the body is just an instrument or metaphor for something we are trying to learn."