

# The Boston Globe

Centerpiece

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 29, 1984

Telephone 929-20

## Dr. Benson's message to scientists: don't overlook the Faith Factor

In a new book, Benson says that belief, coupled with meditation, can augment the physiological benefits he documented in his earlier work. He dubs this effect the Faith Factor and, in "Beyond the Relaxation Response," reports on his studies of Tibetan yogis who can raise their body temperatures during deep

Benson acknowledges that his latest research has led him into a gray area between traditional faith and meditative practices on the one side, and, on the other, scientific observation.

Science, he says, has "largely turned its back on healing and religion" since Descartes pronounced body and mind separate. "As a scientist and physician," he said in an interview, "I can observe, as have others, that when people believe in higher forces or factors that influence their lives, such as the idea of God, these physiological changes occur. . . . What I don't try to answer is the question as to whether or not those factors exist."

Benson's colleagues, while praising his past work, are cautious. "There's a lot of intrinsic, intuitive appeal" to the Faith Factor, said Dr. John Pastore, a cardiologist at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Brighton. "But I think many of us are going to be waiting for verification. One experimenter's work has to be reproduced by another before the medical community gives it credence, or acts upon it. The medical world is very conservative in accepting the kind of data Benson is offering."

### "Breaking ground"

On the other hand, said Pastore, "given that it is Benson pushing this thesis, I'd say it has to be taken very seriously. There's no question that he's played a major role in bringing out the importance of psychological influences on the cardiovascular system. Some of the applications of his work could probably be more widely used than they are."

Deane H. Shapiro Jr., of the University of California at Irvine, editor of a new anthology of meditation research, said Benson is "breaking ground in an exciting new field. There's large and well-documented body of work on the placebo effect, but very little on the possible physiological effects of belief systems. Benson is in an optimal position to do it."