

Healing the Spirit with Acupuncture

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Having initially prepared myself with undergraduate studies in psychology and comparative religion I eventually became a practitioner of Asian healing systems including Shiatsu, acupressure, acupuncture, herbology, Chinese diet, as well as *Taijiquan*, and *Qigong*, both systems of moving meditation and healing, as well as martial arts. My earlier studies gave me a psychological and philosophical bias to healing which I also found, especially in the Taoist aspects of Oriental medicine. Although I had many experiences of body, mind, spirit integration, both as a receiver and giver of Shiatsu and acupuncture, I started to become dissatisfied with the way in which this could be rationalized. Treatments that were guided mostly by intuition were definitely more apt to create this integration than those without. Although this was creating many good healing sessions, and I loved the process of working with and developing intuition, I was still somewhat mentally confused. Acupuncture had such a well-developed theoretical basis for the treatment and prevention of physical complaints. Why wasn't this as true on the mental and spiritual levels as well? I had to look deeper! I taught myself to read Classical Chinese with some difficulty and looked into the ancient texts. I terminated the Shiatsu school and began researching through the Harvard, Boston University, and Brown library systems. I read everything from Taoist philosophy, to the first acupuncture texts written 150 years before Christ, to hundreds of books and articles by Western Asian scholars about the old culture that produced these healing systems.

Body, Mind, and Spirit in Acupuncture

Fifteen years and a thousand titles later in my bibliography I stumbled upon a clue that tied all of my previous research together. It was only a paragraph in the earliest Chinese pharmacopoeia written in 132 AD, paraphrasing another paragraph in China's first written text on acupuncture, the *Simple Questions* of the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* of 150 BC. Here was what I was looking for. It said that in ancient times there were three levels of healing, physical, mental, and spiritual. These two texts considered the treatment **and** prevention of physical disease to be the **lowest** level. All of the acupuncture styles that I had studied seemed to have this level down pat. In contrast the current practice of Western medicine, although it excelled in treating the most extreme cases of physical disorders, is only in its extreme infancy in preventing them, in most cases hardly going beyond well-informed common sense. The middle level, according to these old texts, treated and prevented mental problems. Here it was. The answer to my question was getting clearer: physical problems on the lowest level, mental problems on the middle level. The highest, and most spiritual level in these texts was more of a problem, however. This level is supposed to treat *ming* 命, which can be translated as either Mandate, Destiny, or Fate. The idea was that if a person had a correct relationship with Destiny, good health on the mental and physical levels would be a side effect. In contrast, if a person did not have such a relationship, they would get sick no matter what else they did or didn't do. Of course no mention was made as to how one was to go about this level of healing. The term *ming* was not used in any acupuncture texts that I was aware of. Apparently the discussion was dropped for another two thousand years, taken for granted, or forgotten. The only direct reference to *ming* is the most important acupuncture point on the body is called the "Gate of Destiny."

Destiny

It seems as though my big discovery was also a big problem. As a morally responsible acupuncturist and teacher, how was I supposed to provide acupuncture service at this highest level if I didn't even know what it was? Or, determined as I was, how could I find out how to do it? In my attempt to answer this second question, I turned to my thousands of pages of meticulously organized research notes for the answer. To my surprise, I found that in the historical period during and prior to the printing of the first acupuncture texts, the most important philosophical and political doctrine of the day was what was called the Mandate of Heaven, *tianming* 天命, and was concerned with the divine right of kings. This doctrine stated that the emperor, as Son of Heaven, could only keep the throne through correct

action, moral and otherwise. On all levels, the emperor was supposed to be the intermediary between Heaven and Earth, which in turn stood for the invisible and visible worlds of spirit and matter. In ancient China, the correct function of the emperor was to spontaneously channel the spiritual forces of Heaven down into the Earth for the good of all, *tianxiazhili* 天下之利. By doing so, the emperor received the “Mandate” of Heaven, which resonated with a universal cosmic order that brought blessings onto the Earth. In contrast, when and if the emperor went out of this alignment, Heaven would begin the process of realignment by sending down progressively more challenging circumstances until the emperor realized the error of his ways, or until someone else with the moral force necessary to maintain this alignment took over in his stead.

At this point in my research I realized that the symbolism of this political doctrine carried over into acupuncture by implying some sort of correct relation between the sacred inner world of every person, symbolized by Heaven, and the mundane events of every day life, symbolized by Earth. Furthermore, the correctness of this relationship depended upon the moral integrity and power of the conscious spirit, *shen* 神 in Chinese, residing deep within the Heart, as symbolized by the emperor, the ruler of the personality, body and mind. The profound significance of this relationship was revealed to me by tracing the development of the Mandate of Heaven in Confucian and Taoist philosophy in the years just prior to creation of the first acupuncture texts.

Dao and De

In these two philosophies Heaven becomes substituted by the word Dao, standing for the creative source from which all things emerge, and to which they inevitably return, while the moral force, or Virtue manifested in the world by the person who stands in right relationship between Heaven and Earth is called *de* 德. In Chinese, the character *de* is comprised of three elements: *zhi* 止, which means “to step forward,”ⁱⁱ *zhi* 直, which is pronounced the same but means “honest,”ⁱⁱⁱ and *xin* 心, which means heart.ⁱⁱⁱ Together, these three elements signify the undeviating movement of an honest heart, a heart-felt path etc.

The importance of *de* to Confucius was described in the *Analects*: “To govern by *de* is to be like the polestar, which abides in its place while all the other stars bow towards [or circle round] it.”^{iv} In other words for the one who attains *de*, the charismatic power of Heaven itself effortlessly guides one’s life and influences those whom one comes in contact with to be in an alignment between Heaven and Earth for the common good of all. Five generations later, the first Daoist classic, the *Daodejing*, or *Classic of Tao and its Virtue*, became the manual for the good emperor of the state, as well as for the emperor within every person. The *Daodejing* taught that individual attainment of *de* spreads throughout the world infecting all with peace and harmony:

Cultivate Virtue in your own person,
And it becomes a genuine part of you.
Cultivate it in the family,
And it will abide.
Cultivate it in the community,
And it will live and grow.
Cultivate it in the state,
And it will flourish abundantly.
Cultivate it in the world,
And it will become universal.^v

The *Daodejing* insists that one who is steeped in *de* becomes invulnerable to the environment: “Wasps and poisonous serpents do not sting it, nor fierce beasts seize it, nor birds of prey maul it . . .”^{vi} In this way, the attainment of *de* preserves the integrity of Heaven and Earth and, like the blessings from Heaven upon its true Son, relates directly to the Mandate of Heaven.

When Heaven and Earth are one within the Heart there is no separation between oneself and the universe. When one realizes he is one with the universe, he no longer has to try to be himself. In fact, trying only serves to create further separation. At this point one’s Original Nature splits, leaving one, as it were, standing outside of himself in desperation trying to get back in to the wholeness of his Original Nature. This is the ancient Chinese version of the Fall, and is described in many myths and legends.

Upon birth into the mundane world, the sacred world of oneness is lost. Salvation in Daoism, as it is in the highest level of acupuncture, is concerned with recapturing this lost unity of Original Nature. Daoist meditation texts tell us that prior to birth Original Nature is comprised of a unity of Destiny, *ming*, and Nature, *xing* 性. At birth these two aspects split apart, with Destiny going to lodge in the Kidneys, and Nature going to lodge in the Heart.

Heaven gives us Destiny as the Mandate of Heaven, or Will of Heaven, implanted deeply inside the two Kidneys, which corresponds to the Emperor of the North. It is here inside the most material part of our internal organs that the Will of Heaven activates the individual will. This place is called *Mingmen*, the “Gate of Destiny,” the most important acupuncture point and energy center in the body located in the lower back between the second and third lumbar vertebrae. Earth gives us Nature, *xing*, which opens up to the external world through the senses. In Chinese the character *xing* 性 depicts something growing, *sheng* 生, inside the heart, *xin* 心. In this context, this growing refers to desire for the things of the world. The senses open to the outside world and detect good and bad, pleasure and pain, beauty and ugliness. Left to its own devices, the Heart is attracted to the good, pleasurable, and beautiful, and repulsed by the bad, painful, and ugly. It chases after one and runs away from the other in reaction to external stimulus. At the extreme, one becomes consumed with things of the external world and forgets about the Mandate of Destiny planted within.

The importance of this split between Destiny and Nature is most evident when one has lost their correct alignment, and Heaven has withdrawn its support. Difficulties, calamities, accidents, disease, and unhappiness come as a side effect of living in this illusion of separation. Instead of the effortless cooperation of Man with Heaven and Earth, he is now forced to struggle independently outside of the Garden by himself. The extreme is “dog eat dog,” and “to Hell with the rest.” Of course this separation becomes justified as one now identifies with the separation and struggle in lieu of his now forgotten Original Nature.

In acupuncture the most important Kidney energy is called *Jing*/Essence 精, which has both a Yin and Yang aspect. The Yang aspect is identified in the *Yijing* with the creative source of the universe, and is associated in the early acupuncture classics with the capacity for energetic work,^{vii} and the function of Will.^{viii} The Yin aspect is called the “Gate of the Mysterious Female,” *Xuanpin*, and the “Root of Heaven and Earth” in the *Daodejing*.^{ix} Ted Kaptchuk calls the Yang Will the “Will that can be willed,” because it is an aspect of the personal will which does things in order to prevent the fear of uncertainty. On the other hand, the Yin Will, which he calls the “Will that cannot be willed,” emanates spontaneously from deep within in resonance with Heaven’s Will and Destiny. In order to attain Virtue, *de*, the trick is to keep these two aspects of Will in harmony, not to let the Yang Will stray too far into the mundane world. A little bit is good, but too much drains the Yin and further separates one from their cosmic alignment. The *Daodejing* is filled with warnings about the excesses of the Yang Will. In Chapter 3 of the *Daodejing* we are admonished to store the essence away as if it were a precious treasure:

Empty your heart/mind (*xuqixin* 虛其心),
Fill your belly (*shiqifu* 實其腹),
Soften the Will (*roqizhi* 弱其志),
And strengthen the bones (*qiangqigu* 強其骨).

This statement is a direct reference to storing away our essence in the Gate of Destiny area (abdomen) rather than expend it foolishly through excessive desire and boldness. In the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Confucius defines the man who, at ease with Destiny, has brought the Yin and Yang Wills into balance:

The superior man does what is proper to his position and does not want to go beyond this . . . He can find himself in no situation in which he is not at ease with himself . . . He does not complain against Heaven or blame men below. Thus it is that the superior man lives peacefully and at ease and waits for his destiny (*ming*, Mandate of Heaven, fate), while the inferior man takes to dangerous courses and hopes for good luck.^x

In Chapter 71, the *Daodejing* regards this misuse of knowledge, i.e., arrogance, as the source of ill health:

“To realize that our knowledge (*zhi* 知) is ignorance,
 This is a noble insight (*shang* 上).
 To regard our ignorance as knowledge,
 This is mental sickness.

Only when we are sick of our sickness
 Shall we cease to be sick.
 The Sage (*shengren* 聖人) is not sick, being sick of sickness;
 This is the secret of health.”^{xi}

In Chinese, the word for this lower level knowledge, *zhi* 知, depicts the accuracy of an arrow, *shi* 失,^{xii} hitting its mark, *kou* 口, and is differentiated from Wisdom, also pronounced *zhi* 智, which adds to the knowledge character by inserting a picture of the sun, *ri* 日, below so that the idea of a more illuminating type of knowledge, i.e., Wisdom, is obtained. Wisdom is the virtue of the Kidneys and is attained when its emotion, fear, is transformed by its spirit, Will. When in the face of uncertainty, one is able to bring ones Yin and Yang into balance, Wisdom arises spontaneously. Wisdom is what allows us to know the difference between the things that can be changed and the things that cannot. It allows us to enter into that state of grace that occurs when Destiny is embraced, instead of being denied. As the source of creative fulfillment within, Wisdom is the bridge between the sacred and the mundane, between that which is in the innermost sanctuary of our being and that with which we are confronted daily in the ordinary moments of our lives. Wisdom is also that which can give us the depth necessary to meet and integrate those peak experiences in life that activate the wake up call for us to change direction away from willful excess to one of willful acceptance of who and what we are.

Destiny as Insurance: Applications to Health Care

The idea of embracing Destiny in the highest level of acupuncture gives a needed perspective on health care issues as we go into the twenty first century. This is especially applicable to the issues of insurance coverage and the integration of Western medicine with what is being euphemistically called Complimentary medicine, which includes acupuncture. The duality, at worst, or polarity, at best, between these two systems vie with one another in an integration that could just as easily be forced by political and economic factors as it could be for medical ones. A real integration calls for an adjustment, not only in health care techniques, but also in worldview. On the medical level, it is not enough to assimilate one spectrum of the Western/Complimentary medicine polarity into the other. To do so would be to place the limits of one side of the polarity upon the other and to severely impose restrictions on the unrestrained and spontaneous growth of not only that which is assimilated, but also on the true spirit of the integration itself.

In order to define an acceptable worldview at this time, it is useful to see the split between Destiny and Nature as the pivot point in the continuum between the two medical polarities. As the individual moves toward the side of Destiny and wholeness, their faith in themselves and in Destiny is restored; their personal lives become more integrated, as does the society as a whole. This movement toward Destiny is one of Natural Healing, such as acupuncture, and is characterized by spontaneity and personal freedom in both the techniques employed as well as in the lives of those who use them. On the opposite end of the spectrum, as a person chooses the path of separation of their Original Nature, and their Nature and Destiny begins to progressively split apart, they begin to deny and fear their own Destiny, get sick, and, paradoxically, become more dependent upon others medically as they place the blame for their ill health more and more on people, things, and events that are outside them. At this stage they are best treated by the technological contrivances of Mechanical Healing which at this time are best suited for extending the lives of their patrons until such a point is reached where they choose to take personal responsibility and bring themselves back into balance.

By understanding this new model of health care, the layperson can choose which direction they wish to pursue at any given time in their lives. At the same time, each medical modality can be free to develop on its own in order to most fully reach the potential it has to offer, or it can combine with other modalities in order to cross fertilize each other in the invigoration of a true synthesis. Individual freedom, as well as freedom in the medical community at large is at stake here. Only a system that allows for the

complete freedom of choice in either direction will be the system that will truly benefit the common good, and, as the saying goes, only the common good is truly the good of all!

Paradigm for Health Care in a Truly Free Society

RETURN TO DESTINY (WHOLENESS & QUALITY)			←————→			SPLITTING APART (SEPARATION & QUANTITY)			
Natural Healing (Spontaneous)		←————→		Destiny-Nature Split		————→		Mechanical Healing (Contrived)	
Integrated Society	← Personal Integration	← Intuition (Faith in Destiny)	← Stress ⇒	Denial ⇒ (Fear of Destiny)	Blaming ⇒ Others	Unfulfilled Life			

Author’s Biography

Dennis Willmont has been practicing and teaching Oriental medicine in conjunction with *Taijiquan* and Taoist meditation since 1971. He originally graduated from the *New England School of Acupuncture* in 1976 and continued his studies with Ted Kaptchuk there until 1983. From 1977 to 1984 he directed the *Training Program in Shiatsu and Acupressure* at *The Acupuncture and Shiatsu Therapy Center* in Boston where his program in Acupressure, a synthesis of ancient palm healing and acupuncture energetics became the standard of acupressure tested in national examinations by the *American Oriental Bodywork Therapy Association* today. He currently maintains a practice in acupuncture and Chinese herbs in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, and can be reached at (617) 522-1612.

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ⁱ Léon Weiger, *Chinese Characters: Their Origin, Etymology, History, Classification and Signification*, (New York: Paragon, 1965) Lesson 63A
ⁱⁱ Weiger, 582
ⁱⁱⁱ Weiger, Lesson 10K
^{iv} William Edward Soothill, *The Hall of Light, A Study of Early Chinese Kingship*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951) 1, Quoting the Confucian *Analects*
^v John C. H. Wu (Translator), *Lao Tzu- Tao Teh Ching*, (New York: St. John’s University Press, 1961) 54, *Tao-te Ching* Chapter 54
^{vi} Wu 79, *Tao-te Ching* Chapter 55
^{vii} Henry C. Lu, *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine and the Difficult Classic-- Su Wen*, (Vancouver: The Academy of Oriental Heritage, 1978) 56, 57, *Su-wen*, Book III, Chapter 8
^{viii} Paul U. Unschuld, *Medicine in China: Nan Ching, The Classic of Difficult Issues*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 367
^{ix} Wu 8, *Tao-te ching*, Chapter 6, my translation
^x Chan Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) 102, *Doctrine of the Mean* (14)
^{xi} Wu 103, *Tao-te ching* Chapter 71
^{xii} Weiger, Lesson 131E