

TRANSPERSONAL ACUPUNCTURE

*An Eastern approach to treating
the body, mind, and spirit*

ACUPUNCTURE IS A FORM OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE THAT IS BEST KNOWN FOR ALLEVIATING MUSCULAR-SKELETAL COMPLAINTS AND INTERNAL DISORDERS SUCH AS DIGESTIVE, RESPIRATORY, OR GYNECOLOGICAL AILMENTS. WHAT MOST PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW IS THAT ACUPUNCTURE IS ALSO AN EFFECTIVE TREATMENT FOR EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL IMBALANCES.

Chinese medical theory states that a human being is composed of three levels: body, mind, and spirit. These are viewed as a continuum rather than as separate entities. An energy, *qi*, flows within and among these three components, creating a network. Disruptions in energy flow within one of the levels is not isolated to just that level, but can, over time, influence the others. These physical, emotional, and spiritual components are inseparable not only from one another but also from the greater environment. The matrix of energy that connects all life serves as a pathway unifying all organisms. Chinese medical philosophers view the individual as a microcosm of the surrounding earthly macrocosm, and inner bodily functions as a mirror of the status and patterns of the external world. Interruptions or blocks in this network, no matter how large or small, can cause an energetic imbalance. It's like a garden hose with a kink in it that impedes the flow of water. The lack of water flowing through the system will influence the vitality of the plants. The connection can be very direct: A polluted river creates fish carrying toxins in their flesh; when we consume these fish, the toxicity is transferred to our bodies. This can lead to a toxic condition in our system that can be responsible for disease.

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese therapy, still widely practiced, that consists of stimulating certain anatomic points on the body with (sterilized) stainless steel needles. Its purpose is to influence various biochemical and physiological conditions in the body to bring the movement of *qi* back to its natural, balanced state. It makes use of the meridian system, which is an energetic network that facilitates the movement of energies throughout our physical structure. There are 14 meridians that traverse the

surface and internal structures of the human body; they are all connected and can be viewed as one long pathway. Meridians are also the pathways at which the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels of the human being interface.

This article will review some fundamental concepts of health as perceived by Chinese medical theory, and describe acupuncture, particularly Transpersonal Acupuncture, which addresses the energy flow in all three levels.

THE PHYSICAL BEING

The physical level is considered by Chinese medicine to be the most superficial aspect of a being, and is mostly concerned with aches and pains of the muscles and bones. It can be the first and last level affected in a disease process. According to Chinese medical theory, physical pain is caused by blocks in the meridian channels. Therefore, aiding the movement of *qi* along the meridian pathway can relieve pain. There are specific acupuncture techniques that manually release taut bands or trigger points that reside in the muscle fibers, thereby forcing the muscles to relax and reducing inflammation.

Physical problems can arise from an emotional or spiritual source. For example, a person who has carried a lot of responsibility from an early age might feel as though there were a large weight on her or his back, causing chronic tension in the neck and shoulder muscles. Emancipating the energy lodged within those muscles not only relieves the physical discomfort, but also releases the emotional and spiritual blocks that are integrated with it.

BY JIPALA REICHER-KAGAN, LAC ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE DUBISCH



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THE EMOTIONAL BEING

There are seven main emotions considered in Chinese medicine: anger, joy, worry, pensiveness, sadness, fear, and shock. These seven emotions are viewed as broad categories containing many other types of feelings.

Each emotion has a particular effect on the movement of *qi* within the body, and each emotion is related to a certain organ. The liver is most influenced by the emotion of anger, for example. Emotions that are out of balance, meaning that they are experienced in an amount disproportionate to the other emotions, will compromise the energy of internal organs over time by disrupting the flow of energy through the meridian pathway that supplies the internal organs. Shock suspends energy, worry ties it up in knots, and fear directs *qi* to descend, temporarily suspending a person's connection with his or her energy. Emotions can lead to disease when they are experienced for a long period of time, are particularly intense, go unacknowledged, or are suppressed. Under those conditions, emotions can be responsible for certain internal organ deficiencies or excesses, which can lead to physical disorders. For example, if a person experiences a lot of anger and does not express it, over time *qi* can become constrained, which can lead to headaches, aches and pains, tiredness, and anxiety.

THE SPIRITUAL BEING

The spirit level infuses life with depth and meaning. In order to grasp a deeper understanding of the spiritual basis of Chinese medicine we have to understand that there are five spirits that make up the human psyche. Lorie Dechar, an acupuncturist from Nyack, explains in her book *Five Spirits: Alchemical Acupuncture for Psychological and Spiritual Healing*, "These five spirits are thought of as psychic entities, animating deities who reside in us, each with its own nature and psychospiritual function." The spirits are omnipresent, guiding our life force and influencing the direction of our existence. Without them, there is no life. In addition, they link the individual to the greater energetic life force.

The five spirits are:

神

Shen—the spirit of fire, associated with inspiration, destiny, awareness, and consciousness.

云鬼

Hun—the spirit of wood, associated with vision and imagination.

意

Yi—the spirit of earth, associated with intention, clear thought, and manifestation.

白鬼

Po—the spirit of metal, associated with receptivity, knowing, and sensation.

志

Zhi—the spirit of water, associated with instinctual power, life force, will, and wisdom.

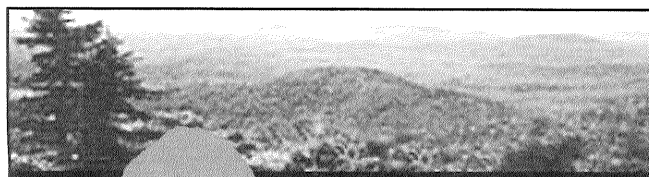
If the spirits are not in harmony with each other, people will recognize an imbalance in their lives. The spirits are particularly sensitive to changes in one's environment. They get overwhelmed easily by events that take place in our daily lives and respond well to respectful treatment, which includes acknowledging the role they play in our existence and having an ongoing awareness of them. People who are good candidates for treatment of imbalances or blockages at the spirit level are those who demonstrate incongruent behaviors, experience restlessness, describe an uncomfortable quality within their body, are depressed, or feel that life has no meaning.

TAPPING INTO OUR ENERGY FLOW WITH ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture points (acu-points) are areas of electrical sensitivity, or gateways, along the body's meridians, which allow access to the pathways of the body's energy flow to correct imbalances. From a scientific perspective, the needles, when inserted at specific acu-points, stimulate sensory receptors and nerves that are responsible for releasing neurotransmitters, which aid in pain relief.

Researchers have found unique electrical properties at acu-points. When measured with a direct-current electrical amplifier, acu-points are found to have lower electrical resistance and higher conductivity than the surrounding skin. Altered states of consciousness, such as sleeping or hypnosis, can produce a significant change in the conductivity of the acu-points. Also, a disturbance in the electrical circuit, for example some sort of block such as a disease, interferes with the electrical current flow at the acu-points. When the acu-points do not have a high enough conductivity, it indicates that there is a block in the flow of energies somewhere along the meridian pathway. In addition, the measurable electrical current at acu-points has been found to change with emotional fluctuations.

In the United States, people are most familiar with the use of acupuncture to relieve pain on a physical level. Clinical studies have proven acupuncture to be effective at doing so. Less familiar, however, is the idea that acupuncture is one of a very few healing practices that has the capacity to support all levels of the human being simultaneously. Transpersonal Acupuncture in particular creates a forum within the human being, allowing the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels to interface.



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TRANSPERSONAL ACUPUNCTURE

Transpersonal Acupuncture works with the adaptive qualities of the body and the body's innate ability to heal itself. By influencing the flow of energy with the insertion of thin metal needles, the practice corrects root imbalances in the body that lead to symptoms and disease. Those imbalances can affect not just the individual on all levels (spiritually, emotionally, and physically), but influence interactions with the outer world. Transpersonal Acupuncture also nurtures the connections between the self and the outer world. By balancing the energetics in the network and breaking through blockages that have formed as a result of past disease, trauma, or established pattern, Transpersonal Acupuncture improves health, outlook, and lifestyle.

Transpersonal Acupuncture shares the same theory and anatomical acu-point location as traditional acupuncture. What makes it different is the attitude of the practitioner. The intent is to view the person as part of an integrated network and to reestablish a balanced flow of energy through the three levels of body, mind, and spirit, as well as in relation to the outside world.

Here is an example. A client, Betty, had been plagued with allergies and asthma since early childhood. She came to me seeking help with the symptoms of those ailments. During the intake evaluation, she described that her house was damp, since it is nestled at the bottom of a hill and had a tendency to collect water in the basement. We believed that there was a connection between the frequency of the allergy attacks and wheezing that she was experiencing and the water that was harbored in her dwelling. In addition, Betty is a spiritual teacher, and as a part of her career she sometimes internalizes her patient's imbalances.

The intent of one of our treatments was to remove what we call External Dragons (forces from the outside that get detained in the body) with a specific needling technique, from the lineage of Dr. J. R. Worsley, acupuncturist and founder of TAI Sophia Institute in Columbia, Maryland. In Betty's case there were two different Dragons: the dampness in the house, and the emotional/spiritual imbalances of her clients. During the treatment it became very clear to her that it was time to break the cycle of using her body as a retainer for other people's imbalanced psychologies. When the needles were taken out, she reported feeling as if this pattern had been broken.

The week following the treatment she relived and let go of certain memories that had negative emotions attached to them, and she said that she felt as if a wind were moving through her. Her allergies decreased and her wheezing lessened significantly. She still lives in the same house, so the dampness will continue to be a negotiated factor in her health process. However, she felt as if the pattern of internalizing other people's psychologies had been broken.

MOVING TOWARD WHOLENESS

Alternative therapists have the freedom to focus on more than one aspect of patients' health care. They have the liberty to address emotional and spiritual concerns as well as physical complaints, as in the example of Betty. Bestowing full attention on patients and attending to their physical, emotional, and spiritual components allows them to feel that all aspects of their being are finally recognized.

Adopting a holistic perspective can pose a challenge. Most of us are educated in a dualistic society, whose theoretical underpinnings are forged in part from the philosophies of René Descartes. We are taught to value reason over intuition and to view the world through a linear framework: A certain activity will bring a particular outcome. The focus of Western medical theory is on quantification as opposed to qualification.

Descartes is considered to be the father of modern philosophy, and many of his ideas influenced current Western medical theory. Descartes was convinced that reason was the only path to knowledge. Nothing could be accepted as truth unless it was clearly perceived. He stated that humans could rise above their body's feelings and think rationally, and believed that the mind had the capacity to dominate the mechanical body—even operate independently from it. Western medical theory derived its inherently dualistic qualities from such reasoning. This is demonstrated when illness is treated on a symptomatic basis, as opposed to identifying a root cause and practicing preventive medicine.

Mark Seem, Director of Tri-State College of Acupuncture, has written extensively on what he believes to be the emergence of a new model of health care, one that integrates the three levels of the physical, emotional, and spiritual. As he describes in his book *Bodymind Energetics*, "A premise of the new paradigm will be that if a patient feels something is wrong, then something really is out of balance and requires some sort of body-mind reintegration. Therapies will be judged no longer on the basis of their scientific validity alone, but rather in terms of how effective they are in understanding and treating the problem, as the patient experiences it."

The job of a Transpersonal Acupuncturist is to look at the patient with open eyes, viewing his or her spiritual, emotional, and physical components as one fluid energy matrix that is interconnected with the larger world. This kind of treatment lifts us out of our limited self-identity and reunites us with our origin—a place of wholeness and of continuous, undisturbed energy, where true healing is found. ©

Jipala Reicher-Kagan is a New York State-licensed acupuncturist, with an MS in acupuncture. She practices three kinds of acupuncture in Kingston, with a focus on Transpersonal Acupuncture. To learn more about Reicher-Kagan's work, visit www.transpersonalacupuncture.com.

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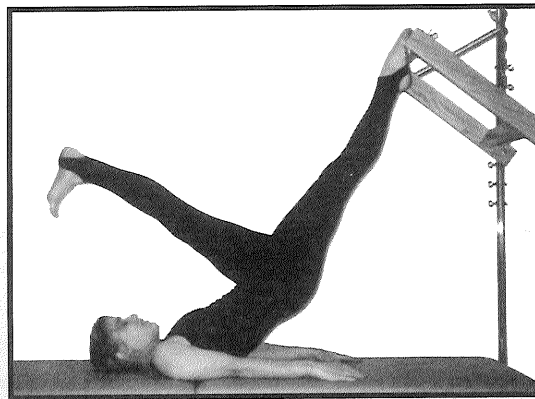
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