

# Notes From Aculand

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## To your physical, mental, and spiritual health!

by Karen Johnson L.Ac., R.N.

“**Acupuncture** isn’t proven.” I love this comment, mostly because it’s kind of humorous. I think the best response to this is something one of my patients said, which was, “2000 years of ongoing human clinical trials have to stand for something!” So here’s the dilemma: why is a fully developed, thoroughly field-tested and proven complete medical system being questioned by a relatively new, constantly changing, and emerging medical system?

I think the answer lies in the testing method. To demonstrate my point, I’d like to share a beloved story that circulated while I was in training, and while it’s been some time now, I believe it goes like this: JR Worsley, the founder of my particular line of practice and the leaders of my school, the Traditional Acupuncture Institute (currently TAI SOPHIA), were invited to participate in a study comparing the

effectiveness of acupuncture with other modern medical approaches to relieve the symptoms of an acute asthma attack. They were interested in this opportunity and proceeded to schedule an interview with the researchers, who enthusiastically described the proposed experiment in which test subjects were to undergo artificially induced asthma attacks, while modern western medical and ancient Chinese medical techniques were administered and compared for effectiveness in relieving their



symptoms. After listening quietly to the proposal, Worsley paused a moment before saying, “Well, the ancient Chinese medical treatment for artificially induced asthma



attacks is to quit artificially inducing them.” At which point, the interview ended.

I like this story because it highlights some fundamental differences in how situations are perceived and treated in the different medical models. In modern western testing methods, the objective is to be very consistent, to rule out a lot of variables, and to focus on similarities. If you read a test study, it will tell you that subjects have been selected based on things like age, time suffering from the problem, pain scale rating, frequency of onset, etc... Something is tested, and the same thing is repeated exactly for each subject (i.e., the medicine was given at a certain dose, at a certain time, for a certain number of days, and outcomes were evaluated at one



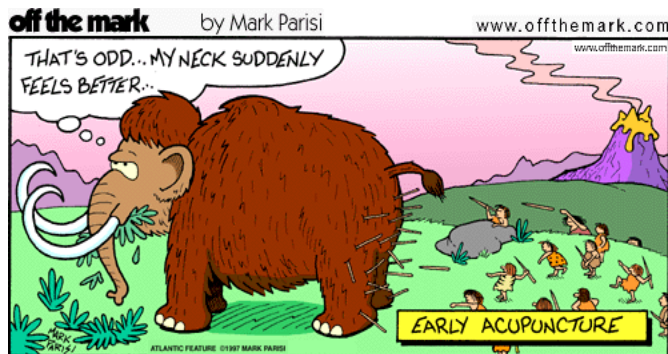
month, three month, and six month intervals and this was compared to a control group who received a placebo dose, but who were evaluated in the same way). The strength of this system is in the standardization and the effort to remove a lot of personal variables, and you get a result like Advil® for headaches. It's good in general for headaches: take 2 every four hours and usually you get results.

Acupuncture treatment selection works in an entirely different fashion. As opposed to standardization, the skill of the practitioner comes from the

ability to **INCLUDE** a large number of variables and customize the treatment to that specific person at that specific time. To treat a headache, for example, an acupuncturist considers exactly where the pain occurs, the character, frequency, intensity, duration, changeability, time of day, season, recent history (sleep, stress, work, emotional factors, diet, and medications) as well as the personality of the patient. The ultimate goal is to correct the forces that lead to the headache, not just relieve the immediate symptoms. The end result is that while Advil may take care

of the occasional generic headache, a person suffering from frequent headaches may do better with acupuncture, because the problem might be intercepted at the source. Back to testing and duplication of results, you can see why it's hard to duplicate all the individual variables that go into designing an acupuncture treatment, so that it can be tested in "double blind" or variable reduced studies.

Next month we will discuss testing methods that are more appropriate to acupuncture and other "alternative therapies."



*The fragrance of blossoms soon passes;  
The ripeness of fruit is gone in a twinkling.  
Our time in this world is so short,  
Better to avoid regret:  
Miss no opportunity to savor the ineffable.*

*-Loy Ching Yuen  
20th century Taoist Master*

## Time For Letting Go

In March, I wrote about the movement of qi, the dynamic upsurge we call spring, complete with sprouting plants, animals waking from hibernation, and people making busy, sunny, summer plans. Well now, in the ever-morphing movement of seasonal qi, we can see the opposite manifestation. Instead of qi rising (think sap rising in the trees), we now see qi falling (literally, the leaves are falling.) Cool, and then cold, will replace the heat, and stillness will dominate over activity.

Emotionally, the "energy" of fall duplicates what happens in grief and loss - that sudden sinking feeling, an elevator headed straight for the ground, the inevitability of letting go.

In acu-speak, we call this the



"metal" element. It has a relationship with both the refined qi of the breath, forever coming in and going out, and the more material bowel movement, also the result of taking in and letting go. Many moments in our lives involve some sort of letting go, and we may perhaps feel the grief that goes with that movement. It's good to remember, however, that after the letting go of the fall, comes the deep quiet of the winter, and then, right around the corner...another spring.