

Notes From Aculand

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To your physical, mental, and spiritual health!

Karen Johnson L.Ac., R.N.

This month we examine the effect of acupuncture on emotions.

Acupuncture patients often report that they feel better emotionally after treatment. They describe smoother relationships, more direct and appropriate communication, a sense of stress falling away, new insight into an old problem, calm where there was frustration, or assertiveness where there was timidity. Is this real? How can this happen? How is this a natural and accepted part of healing through acupuncture?

According to Chinese medical understanding, the body and the mind are not separate entities. They are interconnected, interrelated...a continuum of sorts. As one text says, "In this interconnectedness lies one of the basic principles of Chinese medicine-the medical theory never departs from the physical, but its definition of the body includes what the west would call psychology." In that way, strong emotions are recognized to have an effect on physical phenomena, and stressed physiology can influence emotions. The book describes this in another, more poetic fashion, regarding whether or not one can separate an

influence from a result..."The cause is the effect; the line is a circle."¹

There is a special concept in oriental theory that most people in the west haven't heard of. There is no equivalent for it in our language. It's sort of like "qi", the concept of life force, that something that clearly distinguishes life from non-life. It's perfectly obvious. We know it when we see it. The next concept is called "Shen." In some texts "Shen" is interpreted as "spirit," or our unique human consciousness. It's the "ability to think, discriminate and choose appropriately...and is the awareness that shines out of our eyes..."¹

Observing the Shen and the state of emotions is part of diagnosis. As mentioned above, strong emotions can influence the body or vice versa. The Shen will show the cumulative result. In a chicken and egg sort of way, we can ask, did she become sick because she was sad, or is she sad because she is sick?

A good example of this is a diagnosis (here comes a little acupuncture) called "stagnant liver qi."



In acu-lingo, "liver" is not just the physical organ in the body, but is an array of phenomena that includes smooth movement throughout the body and mind. An apparently disparate group of symptoms—headache, stomach ache, menstrual cramps, frustration, and rash decision making would all be seen as one thing. Stagnant liver qi shows up in the spectrum of human experience. An acupuncture treatment designed to mobilize liver qi and disperse stagnation will effect physiology and psychology simultaneously. A brighter Shen which also translates as a happier, more self aware person is embedded in the result.

By the way, I am a big fan of combining acupuncture with counseling or psychotherapy. Energy movement plus self understanding can be very effective.

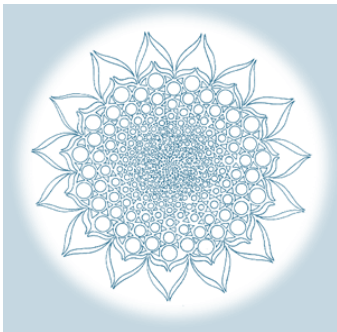
¹ *The Web That Has No Weaver* by Ted Kaptchuk.

The following passage was written by Katherine F. of Brookville, MD. Although new to acupuncture, she was profoundly able to capture the experience in words. I thank her deeply for sharing these notes with us.

Notes from the table...

My first acupuncture session was last week. Knew nothing about acupuncture except a friend's recommendation (something about the stress he was probably tired of seeing?) -- and seeing a presentation that Karen did on the basics of acupuncture. These healing arts have developed and endured in so many cultures over the ages. Didn't know what I wanted, but anything would help and I was ready to go with the program, open to the experiences.

The first treatment left me with a feeling of lightness and an improved sense of well-being. What was that about? Driving to the office after the session, I felt reduced physical pressure from head to toe; freed from pulls and tugs of stress. Maybe this complicated life was manageable.... The story got stranger: my taste buds shifted such that now, some 5 days later, I still find no interest in coffee, salts, sweets (well, maybe a sweet



potato). This coupled with a craving for minerals, proteins. My body seemed healthier and in control (enough to get me to the Safeway to buy salmon and spinach). Did Karen's work return "voice" to my entire

system (replacing that old "Blueberry Muffin" refrain)? Had to think about this. Suppose there were blockages in my energy flows (is that the "chi"?) such that I rely on sweets, coffee, etc. to push me forward in coping with a stressful job and ugly commute. Those frozen energy patterns have defended against stress (regardless of whether stress is at hand) -- but maybe they have been stuck. It feels like Karen's acupuncture work released energies to reopen a healthier flow as nature intended. When she finished, I said it felt like cardboard had been replaced with flexible clear glass under my skin. I coughed and sneezed a lot, lacked the righteous indignation to bubble at the bureaucracy where I work, didn't want to stop for coffee -- and was a bit tired for rest of the day. Could that be what happens when the coping barriers are reduced and my body has a chance to return its energies to the way they should flow? Over the weekend, the well-being stayed, my perceptions were heightened and ... I coughed a lot. Seemed like my body was readjusting to the flows of its own energies. Maybe that created some vulnerability as the systems grew accustomed to the different alignment. This was a welcome opportunity!

Second acupuncture treatment was today. With needles settled along my spine in a somewhat hedgehog moment, Karen left while the treatment did its work. I had vivid images as time ticked by. First was that the left (weaker) side of my back was made of cornmeal, the right of buckwheat flour. The two were trying to balance out the grains across the two sides. You readers who bake -- this makes sense, right -- when you're struggling to knead two textures of flour into a dough? I couldn't escape that image until there was a sense that the textures were indeed blending

across the spine. Indeed, the balance began to come forward.

The next image was a large bird slowly extending and stretching its right wing, folding it back into place, and then doing the same with the left wing. If the first acupuncture session was about unblocking flows, then this one was about allowing balance back into the equation.

Were these two sessions a rerouting of energies toward to unused but healthier pathways? Perhaps there were physiological barriers my body had constructed against the stresses of this lifestyle and my responsibilities (me and tens of thousands of other DC area beltway voyagers). Karen felt these in the pulses and shook their fibers when she went for the energy transferring meridians. Could be a period of bumping (this cough and tiredness) for a while yet. However, I'm enjoying the well being that this balance and flow bring.

Meeting acupuncture is a huge step toward goodness and health. The ancient ones took centuries to figure out how to restore these energy flows. I'll check back in to Karen's newsletter when I've given more of my shorter, human-sized



time to experience more of the healing that she brings. My friend's gift certificate now seems more like a gift across the ages to an overstressed, hypercaffeinated manager and mom! Enjoy your experience with acupuncture.