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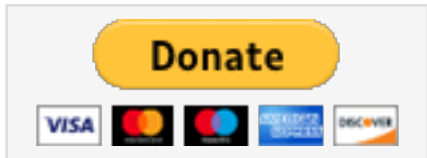


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As a practitioner of Chinese medicine, I am often asked the question, “How does acupuncture work?” The system of acupuncture doesn’t fit neatly into the box of modern science, which has led skeptics in the West to attempt to debunk its methods and capabilities. Yet Chinese medicine has remained steadfast in its theories and principles and for more than 2500 years; surely placebo cannot carry a treatment for more than two millennia! So how, really, does it work?

A Phenomenon of Breath

In Daoist and classical Chinese medical theory, the Universe is considered a phenomenon of breath.* The expanding quality of breath is called Yang; the contracting quality of breath is called Yin. This phenomenon permeates the natural laws governing our planet and also our bodies. Expansion and contraction cannot exist without each other, just as up requires down, and day requires night. The atmosphere of our planet is the direct result of the

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interaction, or breath, between the heavens (Yang) and the Earth (Yin). Likewise, breath is essential to human beings: we expand our lungs to allow air in; we exhale and as air goes back out, the contraction moves energy *inward*. This dynamic of the lungs is what sets our entire meridian system in motion.

In Chinese medicine we call that system the *Jing Luo* (meridians and sub-meridians). The *Jing Luo* (as a system) flows like a river through the body, originating deeply “underground” in our organs and rising to the surface, hence, closer to the heavens. Our *Jing Luo* overlies and influences other systems (nervous, circulatory) and flows alongside the fascia, which are specialized connective tissues running throughout the body. These tributaries and streams of the body change their directional energy at the extremities and flow into each other in a particular pattern.

A Matter of Motion

What is essential to the system’s health is motion. Illness occurs when something in our bodies becomes fixed or blocked off, either by outside injury, the effects of the climate around us, or injury resulting from improper diet or lifestyle. Imagine a mudslide collapsing into a riverbed. The river will first back up then find a way to get through, but its flow will be less efficient and may spread debris downriver, causing disruptions far down the pathway. Now imagine an injury to the body. In health, the *Jing Luo* balances itself and adapts to changes in the environment, but if an injury is not treated quickly and properly, it may cause a blockage to the *Jing Luo* that will obstruct the

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flow of that channel from that point onward.

Our health and wellness is impacted by the world outside of the body. The *Jing Luo* system connects our organs to the surface of the body, where we interact with the elements and atmosphere: water, fire, earth, metal and wood, which correspond with “the five motions of the heavens” and manifest as cold, heat, dampness, dryness and wind.

A Part of Nature

Our bodies are vulnerable to climatic factors; for example, think of how stiff your hands become when working outside in the cold. Relatedly, when we put icy cold beverages in the stomach, it cools our “digestive fire” and inhibits proper digestion, just as cold fingers stiffen and become harder to use.

The tissues of our bodies also relate to nature more directly in terms of the five elements mentioned above. The wood element, for example, relates to the tendons of our body. They should give us strength to stand tall, yet also be supple and pliable. Just as a healthy tree can bend in the wind, we should be flexible yet stay rooted. If we start to think of ourselves as a part of nature in this way—what happens on the outside is related to what happens on the inside—Chinese medicine makes sense to most everyone.

When the “rivers” flow freely, the body can constantly adapt to the environment and shift along with the world around us. Acupuncture effectively treats the *Jing Luo* system to set the body back on its course of

health, which always begins with the breath.

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**The Big Bang theory, the prevailing cosmological model for the early development of the known universe, hinges on the concept of a shift from an extremely contracted state (Yin) to an expanding one (Yang).*



A PHENOMENON OF BREATH

ASHLEY GODDARD

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