

Trauma: A Loss of Order and Innocence

Felice Dunas, PhD

Having just observed the fifth anniversary of 9/11, it has been fascinating to watch the entire country respond to the traumatic events of that day through the perspective of OM theory. Trauma response is one of many subjects that our hard-working schools do not have time to teach, so it may be a foreign concept to you. The behavior exhibited by individuals, business, social trends and government agencies all show us different aspects of the OM understanding of trauma.

Essentially, trauma acts like a wave of *qi*, washing over the body like ocean water bathing the sand. It doesn't matter if the traumatic event is mental, emotional or physical. The energetic dynamics are similar. One may notice a wave of trauma enter the body. Sometimes it feels like hair standing up on the back of your neck, or the food you are eating stops digesting and sits like a rock in your stomach. It's the voice of dread you hear inside when you know something bad is coming or it may feel like pain, radiating in waves, from the sight of injury.

Part of our immediate trauma response is what I call the "I'm fine" syndrome. Have you ever tripped and fallen only to immediately sit up and respond to those who gather around you by saying "Oh no, I'm fine, really." You may be injured, but that is not what registers. Before you notice how you actually feel, you have automatically defended yourself against injury by mentally denying all possibilities besides *I'm fine*. This appears to be one of our barricades against the invading wave.

Trauma behaves like a burn. It sinks in deeper over time. This is why a high school or college injury may completely heal, but if the trauma is not addressed, a 40-year-old patient will present with chronic tendonitis or worse, arthritis, in the area that sustained and "healed" injuries decades earlier. Getting to a traumatized patient sooner rather than later is a good idea.

There are many approaches to take when treating trauma in your patients. You must consider the "energetic profile" of the individual before anything else. This is the term I use to describe the complete diagnosis according to OM. How is the energetic profile of this patient reflecting the trauma they have experienced? It can show up in a myriad of ways: Heart heat causing anxiety, Liver congestion leading to addictions, Spleen *yang xu* resulting in eating disorders, or Lung *yin xu* resulting in asthma. The wave moves from outside the body inwards, knocking out delicate patterns of *qi*, causing chaos as it heads toward the organs. Have you noticed that chronically traumatized people tend to live more chaotic or, in efforts to control the trauma, rigid lives?

The Liver can't hold *qi* in place as the wave forces healthy metabolic patterns out of alignment, so supporting proper alignment of *qi* in the channels is always a good idea. Working with the wood element, the element of organizational capacity and movement is always a good move.

I am excited to tell you about an organization that is entirely devoted to the healing of trauma. Acupuncturists Without Borders, a young nonprofit group, got started this last year by addressing trauma-related difficulties affecting Katrina survivors. Its volunteers have spent several months in New Orleans giving thousands of treatments using NADA protocol. Displaced people, hospital workers, police, fire and other government agencies have all utilized the acupuncture treatments.

Over this year, we have watched trauma responses worsen in the New Orleans population rather than improve. That is the nature of trauma. Unless stopped, it sinks in deeper. Now suicide rates and crime are up. Chaos is up as the duration of untreated trauma lengthens. Practitioners and donations are needed to help with the next several projects which include working with military personnel returning from the Middle East and disaster relief abroad. Go to www.acupuncturistswithoutborders.org for more info. This is a wonderful way to learn more about the treatment of trauma and to get involved in a professional outreach group.

Q&A: Integrating Into Integration

Dr. Dunas,

I have been hired by a small hospital to be the staff acupuncturist. We have a complementary medicine department, consisting of myself and a massage therapist. It is a great opportunity to help integrate the practice of Oriental medicine. I wonder if you have any thoughts on what may be important for me to be aware of as I continue here.

Josh S.

J.S.,

Congratulations for being on the cutting edge of our industry and thank you for your good work. You are in a very responsible position that affects the reputation of the profession. I suggest you learn their medical language and become a translator of OM ideas and concepts into that language. I consider this the single most important thing you can do. This has been a challenging aspect of my career, but it has allowed me to communicate our medicine to CEOs around the world. When you use Western medical understanding and terminology to teach OM ideas, you allow the medical staff to open their minds to your work. Do not expect them to want to know what you know. But if they show interest, teaching them in their medical language will be imperative.

I was trained before there were schools in the U.S. and my teachers were not worried about legalities because the whole darn business was illegal. They never told me that OM couldn't accomplish something. As a result, I perform treatments that my colleagues have told me are dangerous or impossible. That has never fazed me and I find the impossible the most interesting cases to work on. If you think this medicine can do far more than you were taught, you are correct. While it is important to work within the legalities of your state, do not underestimate the tool you have been given. Give it range, stretch into new areas and watch with delight as the great results express themselves.

Use your ego to stand for the truth of integrating East/West medical ideas and practices, not to stand up against other egos or ways of healing. Your humility, when coupled with results, will earn you a reputation befitting our profession. Inspiring respect in others through quiet action is the way of the Superior Man.

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