

God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

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My understanding of Chinese medical philosophy begins with the rather optimistic belief that, in general, we begin our life in a state of health or harmony. Although this constitutional starting point is relative for each individual, it is our bodies natural inclination to work to sustain this grounded state of well-being. It is primarily due to the effects of lifestyle and emotions, and interactions with environmental forces that patterns of disharmony begin to arise. [Chinese cosmology](#) further describes a natural order to the workings of the universe, and suggests that if we live in accordance with this order, we will live optimally healthy lives. Based on these premises, I see the larger mission of Chinese medicine as being to help us better understand, and learn to modulate, the forces that are shaping our destiny.

It is just this spirit of a "health-supporting" universe to which I believe [Benjamin Franklin](#) was referring in his saying: "[God helps those who help themselves.](#)" If we substitute the idea of a "natural order" or the Tao for the word "God," this saying reflects what I believe to be the basic organizing principle of Chinese medicine. When we come to understand how our thoughts and actions are impacting our lives, we can learn to live more responsibly and to thereby create a life that is in accordance with this supportive natural order.

Patients generally come to Chinese medicine with complaints that, more than likely, have not been effectively addressed by a Western medical approach. Just as with Western medicine, Chinese medicine seeks to alleviate the symptoms but with one important difference. In the Chinese medical approach, the ultimate goal is not just to return the patient to life as usual prior to their complaint. The greater goal is to understand the message being expressed through the body and to interpret it within the larger context of the person's life as a whole. A symptom is a call for change.

By its very nature, Chinese medicine supports a slow, gentle movement towards harmony and balance, which is based on a growing state of mindful awareness. It is a learning process by which we come to see how our thoughts and actions impact our health. There are several reasons it works so well to create positive and lasting changes. Taking the time for an acupuncture appointment requires that a person schedule a break from their busy schedules and forces them to be present with themselves and an empathetic other. The patient has the opportunity to have their complaints heard and translated into a useful format that can lead to positive change. Through the palpation process and the proper placement of needles, the patient directly experiences a bodily state of "knowing" as to where they are holding tension and where their body is expressing disturbances in the smooth, even flow of energy. Finally, by learning to modulate this energy and information that was first facilitated by our treatment (and later influenced by themselves as a more mindful, educated patient), they learn to live in ever greater harmony both within themselves and in the context of the world at large.

Once a patient sees how their thoughts and actions may be holding them back from the balanced health that is their birthright, they can effect changes that will help restore and balance their energy, and get their life moving forward in a new and healthier direction.

I think it is no coincidence that our current national and global state of chaos resembles a patient with complex medical problems and multisystem failure. We can see how the macrocosm and microcosm mirror one another. We are suffering to the degree that we have abdicated our responsibility towards creating a sustainable and balanced lifestyle. We must come to see the world as it is - interconnected, with all life mutually interdependent. For any of us to prosper, we must work to support the well-being of all. While the effects of our misguided past actions may be painfully profound, they also can act as a great motivational force. Just as an individual's symptoms point towards a cure, our societies current crises could lead to an awakening based on the mindful awareness of how our thoughts and actions could be used to direct our precious life-force to support the good of all.

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