



PHILOSOPHY

## It's All About *Qi* Focus

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My father was a geologist and very much a man of science. He'd pepper our arguments with skepticism. But he was open to challenge. He was a great storyteller and surprised me one day when, while talking to him about *qi*, he described a fellow geologist who had the gift of divining. Divining? It was something my father ridiculed. Until he met colleague "George A."

During one very long field expedition to collect and test soil samples, my father and his team decided to play a joke on "George A." They blindfolded him and took a haphazard route in a Jeep to some unexplored area and set George wandering off with his divining rods to find water. Lo and behold, the rods zinged down where there was an underground spring. They then disoriented poor old George by driving him around in circles once again, bouncing through the bush, placed him in the same stretch of land and told him to track specific mineral deposits.

Off George trundled, blindfolded, divining rods poised, and they zinged down toward a mineral mother lode. Dad said if he hadn't witnessed George firsthand, he would never have believed it was possible for the mind to direct the rods so precisely.

Yes, I have watched bodywork colleagues track meridians with divining rods, but I have also seen patients freak when they see this! Why am I sharing this story? With or without divining rods, it's all about *qi* focus and intention.

*Qi* Focus



"When treating specific meridians and acupoints, be sure and have each one in your mind, in terms of location, function and characteristics," I tell my students. "If you are working on, say, Spleen 6, but your mind is on tonight's movie date or planning a way to get your kid to the dentist later, you end up scattering and confusing your client's *qi*. And the client will feel it."

Similarly, if you treat Spleen 6, but your mind floats around GB21, your *qi* will move to that other point even if that is not your intention!

I sometimes set up a simple little exercise so students can experience this for themselves. After pairing up and deciding who will give the first session, the student who is treating selects a key point in silence, eyes closed. The receiver focuses on the point and speaks up the instant he/she senses the giver's mind drifting off or focusing on a totally different acupoint. The response is immediate. Students often surprise themselves, both as givers and receivers, when they experience a sudden scattering of *qi* in this very simple exercise.

### One Acupoint, Multiple Functions

Similarly, if I am enhancing or dispersing *qi* in, say, Large Intestine 4, my focus, technique and pressure will be very different depending on whether I am easing a general pain, toothache or constipation. Same point; different intention. When treating someone on chemotherapy, there's an art in helping ease pain, discomfort and side effects like nausea, while not actually stimulating the immune system.

How different that approach is from working with HIV patients, where one actively stimulates the immune system while at the same time working on side effects. It's all about focus.

### Working with HIV Patients

It's equally useful to share these subtleties with clients. I had great fun working with a bunch of HIV-positive guys I knew from the gym. They were all body-builders and mindful of diet and

reducing stress in their lives to enhance the effectiveness of medications. So, it was easy to teach them *qi* exercises we could enjoy as a group and they could do for themselves every day at home.

We swooped around the room, arms extended, to mimic T cells to stimulate *qi*. I also taught them how to work on their *San Jiao* in a graceful, dancelike movement. Not only did they respond eagerly, but they also loved the creative contrast to their regular check-ups in local clinics.

After a month of these exercises, some members of the group told me that tests showed an increase in their T cells, and a decrease in their viral count. They were thrilled to discover that something so simple could be so effective! One member of the group, who suffered from neuropathy, found it useful to work on his feet in the morning before doing the T cell dance, as this transformed his entire day. He no longer dreaded waking up in the morning. Because these guys were all body-builders, it was easy to teach them the importance of *qi* focus in thought and movement - not only for their general health, but also to avoid straining their muscles during weight lifting.

### The Joy of *Qi*

Maybe this is a coincidence, but recently a shiatsu colleague of mine in Switzerland asked me to help her obtain a specific Chinese herbal syrup for her persistent cough. I exchanged several e-mails with her and the distributors, who shared names of their associates in Europe. Intense messages flew back and forth. At the end of the week, she e-mailed to say she didn't think she needed the syrup anymore. Somehow, the vigor of our trans-Atlantic exchanges and our combined focus on her problem had helped to shift the congestion. Good *qi* or sheer luck?

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