



ACUPUNCTURE & ACUPRESSURE

## The Way We Are Designed: A Conversation with Gil Hedley, PhD

Jennifer Waters, LAc, Dipl. Ac

I was first introduced to the work of Gil Hedley by Tom DiFerdinando. He gifted me Gil's DVD series. Within in the first ten minutes of watching Gil "de-layer" the body, from the total skin layer down to our visceral core, my view and understanding of the way in which we are designed completely changed. Gil's work was later established in the acupuncture world by Amanda Shayle and her story of needling ShenMen on a cadaver. Thank you all for sharing your stories and experiences.

JW: You have a very interesting and thorough website that does not include much information about yourself. Can you share with us a bit about your background and how you got involved with human dissection?

GH: That's a story I tell in detail in my first book, *Reconceiving My Body*. I have always had an interest in my body ever since I turned 13 and developed a very transparent musculature. I thought, "Wow, cool!! Muscles!!" I started lifting weights and learning about my anatomy. While earning my doctorate in theological ethics at the University of Chicago, I also studied tai chi, massage therapy, and was a certified rolfer. It was my personal interest in my body's workings and my professional interest as a practitioner of rolfing structural integration, that I found my way into the dissection laboratory. I have yet to find my way out of it!

JW: I appreciate your emphasis on the superficial fascia and, in fact, it has helped me to understand more about the acupuncture meridians. Do you understand the meridians to be within the superficial fascia? If so, why or why not?



GH: I have not studied acupuncture or TCM theory regarding the meridians, so these are just my own conjurings. I understand the meridians to be "energetic" phenomenon and the treatment of the

meridians to be a treatment of what might be described as the subtle body, the impact of which ramifies throughout the gross physical body. Understood in that way, I would answer no, I don't believe the meridians to be "within" the superficial fascia or "within" the physical body at all, but perhaps the other way around: maybe the physical body is "within" the meridians and functions relative to them. I really don't know!

Now the superficial fascia, to return to your question specifically, may reveal at some point, by some method, to be the home of presently undiscerned anatomical structures which amount to physical meridians. I haven't seen them, but that's not saying much. With my naked eye, in gross dissection the smaller lymph vessels are also not apparent without using injectable dyes such as were used to first discover them. Perhaps the meridians will be revealed to exist in the same way that the lymphatic system was. And then again, acupuncturists have been accomplishing plenty for a very long time with their needling, whether the meridians are a phenomenon of the subtle body, or the gross physical body, or even of the imagination.

JW: Amanda Shayle, of AcuRegen/Thrive, told me of a story needling one cadaver arm with fascia and one without fascia. I believe the acupuncture point was Shenmen (Heart 7). She said the arm with the fascia conducted a current which could be felt in the heart (of the cadaver) and the arm without the fascia did not. Is this true? Can you explain more about that experiment?

GH: We had fun that day! That was one exploration among many I have conducted with acupuncturists in my courses over the last two decades. I have found that tissues seem to be responsive to needling even at a distance, based on the experiential reactions of participants. And, some needling activities seem to generate more response than others in cadavers. There is, of course, a direct physical effect of twisting needles in superficial fascia. The fibers seem to "wind" on the twisted needle which generates a drag through the tissue as Helen Langevin's research describes. So whether the needle conducts and runs energy through meridian pathways, or the needle generates mechanical forces with physiological effects, it seems that we can feel in some way these effects when needling cadavers. In the experiment at Amanda's table, we found that simply placing the needle did not result in readily palpable sensations, but twisting the needle generated an effect that another person, blindfolded and gently holding the heart in situ, could feel, usually with a several second delay. There were so many variables and considerations that I would be the last to conclude anything from these types of experiments, but they gave us much to think about.

JW: Do you think classes of human dissection should be required of all bodyworkers? Why or why not?

GH: I absolutely do not think human dissection classes should be required for all bodyworkers. That having been said, when you get that urge, follow it to the lab if you can, as this type of study is absolutely invaluable. Cadaver dissection should be done only by the willing in my opinion. Dissecting cadavers is too powerful an experience to have forced upon you. The positive effect on the learning environment is clear when a group is willing and self selected. The donors gifts deserve to be gladly received.

JW: I was told that you are working on a new anatomy book. How are your workshops and classes different from others?

GH: My workshops are based on an approach I call "integral anatomy." Integral anatomy stands on the shoulders of regional anatomy in order to witness and experience the wonders of the forest beyond the naming, and felling, of the trees. Integral anatomy seeks to support the exploration of all the layers of the body and the levels of the person in order to facilitate the experience and

development of the whole person. This emphasis, and this intent to support the integration of the whole, is characteristic of my work.

My workshops have a transformational component for those willing to go there. I am perfectly happy to dive into the minutiae as well. And, ultimately, my workshops are an opportunity to explore your self and expand your experience beyond the frames of reference with which you arrived.

My whole career seems to amount to me "working on a new anatomy book!" And, at present my workflow is to bring all of my archives online to render them accessible through a simple subscription model, and from that online rendering, as I build it, I will "pull" a companion book. This way folks don't have to wait for years to see the end product. I will be creating it in the container of my subscriber portal online to accelerate access to the material and insights I have to share.

JW: Are there areas of the body, based on your years of dissecting, that you feel should not be needed?

GH: Well, there's needling and there's needling, right!? As a bodyworker, my dissection experience caused me to proceed and work with greater caution and sensitivity in areas where I may have previously been too abrupt and unconscious. Also, I was able to go to areas where my prior caution was justified, but my greater knowledge now afforded me appropriate access. The same would apply to acupuncture.

JW: Based on your work and observing the conditions from which people die, can you share with us areas that you feel could be more emphasized as healers?

GH: Healers do well when they are more concerned with people than procedures. They do well when they are as concerned with the quality of connection as they are with the pieces of a puzzle. And they serve best when they look first to the health and wholeness of the person before focusing upon whatever disease may be perceived as well. There is always more going right than wrong in the person before you. Everyone is going to die. When we stand before the donor gifts for the first time, those bodies represent a life with a story much richer than how it ended. Our primary concern as healers is not to keep people from dying, but to enhance the experience of living when asked for help.

JW: I know that you refer often to "light" in your work, and like to shine light within the body. Do you feel that body is a conductor of light? Why or why not?

GH: When the Periodic Chart of the Elements was being developed, the discovery of the elements was a process involving light. The elements have characteristic absorption and emission spectra which can be discerned by interpretation with a spectroscope. Whether carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, or the rest, the elements alone and in combination emit light. The human body, comprised of these elements, is a light emitting, light absorbing phenomenon, and this is an aspect of our human anatomy that we might do well to consider in our quest for self understanding and health. I am fond of saying that "the human body" is not limited by the boundaries of our skin. We are all part of one human body, and the sun is a shared organ, our "master gland." Fun to think about, 'eh?!

JW: What should be required of any healer working with others?

GH: Humility, respect, a willingness to listen and learn and a heart committed to service.

JW: Anything else you would like to share with our readers?

**GH: Hold your good practices dearly and your theories very lightly. This way you can continue your good work and service to others while your stories shift to accommodate the growing body of knowledge.**

APRIL 2015

©2024 Acupuncture Today™ All Rights Reserved