

Qualities of a Great Acupuncturist: Practice from the Heart

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The great acupuncturist is a wise artist who treats from the heart. Such an acupuncturist forms a diagnosis from a connection between his/her spirit and the spirit of the patient. Through the placement of needles or the application of acupressure, the acupuncturist's hand is guided completely by the spirit of the patient.

Although patients come to us with a myriad of physical and emotional signs and symptoms, we must look far beyond these obvious signs to the root of their pathology. The patient's main complaint should never be the sole focus of our treatment efforts. This is not to say that one should not address the superficial symptoms. We certainly want to provide our patients with symptom relief, but the primary focus of our treatment must be the cause of their symptoms. Balance will prevail when a practitioner reaches the root of a disorder and helps the patient detach from his or her pathology. A practitioner lacking in spirit will fail to search for the root of disease in a patient's spirit.

This article explores what it means to treat from the heart. Sometimes we become so consumed by skills and knowledge that we overlook the importance of our personal qualities in our treatment efforts. If we are to address the spirit of our patients, it is necessary that we as practitioners possess a high level of character and spiritual development.

Knowing How

To be effective, needling must be performed by an acupuncturist whose spirit connects with a patient's heart and spirit. What the Chinese refer to as *knowing how* is necessary for the acupuncturist's spirit and hand to know how to locate the patient's spirit. Knowing how comes from the spirit and provides us with the knowledge to live a balanced life. It is a combination of intelligence, wisdom, talent and capacity. This state involves having awareness or knowledge of a patient's condition; an ability to express this knowledge to oneself and one's patient; and being able to manifest power or healing through one's heart.¹

Nine Keys of Healing

Mikio Sankey proposes nine keys of healing broken down into three triads.² These keys describe qualities possessed by great acupuncturists. You will see that with each successive triad, the qualities become less practical (and more spiritual) in nature.

The lower triad consists of skill, knowledge and intention. Nearly anyone who graduates from a reputable Chinese medicine program will possess skill and knowledge. Intention, however, requires additional thought on the part of the acupuncturist, as it involves more than simply placing needles

skillfully at the precise acupuncture points. It is necessary for a practitioner to possess all three of these qualities before being able to aspire to the higher levels of healing.

The middle triad consists of trust, intuition and integrity. Integrity and intention are essential to inspire the necessary energetic changes in a patient. For the real source of imbalance to reveal itself, a patient must have trust in the integrity of the practitioner. How often do we consider the importance of integrity in today's world? Sadly, not often enough.

The upper triad consists of forgiveness, compassion and unconditional love/wisdom. The healing process begins when a practitioner confers unconditional love with each treatment, as this energy is recorded in every cell and at all levels of the patient. Sankey explains that real healing involves much more than working on physical, emotional and mental imbalances. Healing involves helping our patients find their true path in life. Once they uncover who they really are, the process of healing will blossom at all levels.

Sankey contends that practitioners who hold all nine keys are of the highest proficiency and are best able to address the deepest levels of imbalance within a patient. The energies of the three triads are in all of us, but it may take some work for them to express themselves. Once we possess all nine keys, we will have the power to unlock the true imbalance in our patients. How many of the nine keys do you possess?

There are several things we can do as practitioners to help unlock these nine keys of healing that lie within us. After reading this article (and the accompanying poem which appears at the end), you are urged to look into your heart and determine whether you are on the path to becoming a great acupuncturist.

Transform Yourself

If we are to help our patients discover their true natures, it is essential that we are on the healing path ourselves. This is not to say that we need to have completed our process of healing, however, because it is a continuous process that occurs throughout life. We must transcend the most basic level of knowledge and skill and strive to develop our intuition. Opening our capacity for intuition is essential, as intuition is the only part of us that can fully comprehend the nature of things. Treating patients intuitively, based on a connection with their spirit, truly captures the essence of this ancient Chinese art. For intuition to operate freely, we must learn to quiet our minds. Once we are open to intuition, our spirit will guide us along our healing path. This path is not for the weak at heart; it is anything but easy. The rewards of spiritual growth are well worth the arduous journey. To truly help our patients on their journey requires that we carry the scars of having transformed ourselves. We cannot expect to help another find a path we ourselves have not yet traveled.

Be Sensitive

As practitioners of Oriental medicine, we should attempt to raise the consciousness of our patients. In doing so, however, we must be careful not to push them to a level they are not yet ready to experience. We must be sensitive to the level of consciousness of our patients in order to provide them with treatments that will be the most helpful. It is critical to treat each patient as an individual. Each person heals in his/her own way. We must have the sensitivity and compassion to realize this and work within this reality.

Suspend Judgement

Our purpose as practitioners of Oriental medicine is to help patients improve their health and quality of life, whatever that may mean to the patient. It is not our place to label or judge our patients in the process. It would be naïve and egotistical of us to think we understand what the patient is experiencing - it is their process. Just because a patient may present in a way we do not understand or that makes us uncomfortable, does not mean we should intervene to change the process. Often our silent presence in the moment is enough. Patients may have emotional releases during, or in the weeks following, a treatment. We need not attempt to stop the release or explain it away. Our compassion is what is really needed by the patient in these situations, not our advice. It is important that our office provides a safe, peaceful environment in which patients can be themselves and express their true feelings and emotions without being judged.

Listen -- Really Listen

In our training as acupuncturists, we are not taught how to deal with psychological or emotional imbalances. While experience in dealing with these issues makes us better healers, all that is needed is the ability to really listen to our patients. If we listen from a place of non-judgement, compassion and authenticity, and show support for our patients, they will feel safe to engage their personal and spiritual resources to initiate their journey of healing. By listening to and giving hope to our patients, and seeing them as they have the potential to be, healing is already underway.

Empower Patients

People need to play an active role in their healing, as it is not a passive process. It is essential that we work *with* our patients rather than simply work *on* them, as though they were plastic acupuncture models. By explaining the diagnosis in simple terms and providing suggestions on ways patients can help themselves (e.g., nutrition, herbs, acupressure, affirmations), we are empowering them. It is not our task to convince patients to follow our advice. Rather, we must help patients discover for themselves what changes they need to make to regain their health. Providing patients with several suggestions allows them the opportunity to decide what would be best for them. In the author's experience, the more tools offered to patients, the farther and faster they will travel on their healing journey.

Balance Giving and Receiving

If we feel we are giving more to our patients than we are receiving, we must stop and look inside ourselves. Each patient can teach us important lessons, but we will only receive these lessons with an open heart. Our patients can teach us not only about imbalances, but about ourselves. Those patients who demand the most attention from us (and who we find irritate and frustrate us) are teaching us patience and compassion. If we open our eyes and hearts, we will realize that our most difficult patients offer us the gift of our greatest spiritual growth.

Practice from the Heart

*No matter how refined our skills become,
May we remain humble and respect where our knowledge came from -
Namely, the ancient Chinese sages*

Who observed the natural world over the ages.

*All things are interconnected, as we know from yin-yang theory.
Our bodies are a reflection of Nature's calm and fury.
As we create a diagnostic puzzle of the symptoms we uncover,
Remember that we are all connected to one another.*

*Although we are all guilty of occasional labeling and judging,
Remember that all phenomena are constantly developing and changing,
And that a patient may present in a much different way
In another context, or on another day.*

*Rather than seeing ourselves as healers
We must realize that our role is that of teachers -
To plant a seed with our needles and herbs to unleash the power
Of the body to return to balance and blossom as a flower.*

*No matter where we practice or who we treat, may we
Do so with compassion, love, respect and integrity.
If we faithfully practice from the heart,
We will uphold the beauty and dignity of this ancient Chinese art.*

References

1. Larre C, Rochat de la Vallee E. *Rooted in Spirit: The Heart of Chinese Medicine*. New York: Station Hill Press, 1995, pp. 6-179.
2. Sankey M. *Esoteric Acupuncture: Gateway to Expanded Healing*, vol. 1. Los Angeles: Mountain Castle Publishing, 1999, pp. 354-362.

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