

ACUPUNCTURE AND TAI CHI CHUAN - BALANCING INTERNAL ENERGY

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As dawn progresses into full light, an awakening unfolds within those who practice Tai Chi Chuan; it is time for balancing internal energy. For the morning practitioners, this balancing sets the day and is similar to the balancing effect that comes with acupuncture.

Acupuncture has been around for thousands of years, and it is generally accepted that Tai Chi Chuan has been around at least since the thirteenth century. It is not a coincidence that they are both represented by the Yin-Yang symbol. They have a common underlying effect of balancing the energy in the body so that the body can return to a more normal condition for that particular body. Each art appears to accomplish this differently, but in actuality the difference is less striking than the similarity.

The Chinese believe that our energy comes from what we eat and drink, the air we breathe and the exercise we do. In theory, as long as we eat properly and adhere to the basic tenets of good health, our internal energy should be in balance. However, this is not always the case. Internal and external factors are constantly effecting our bodies. As the body is effected, so is the energy within the body.

An example of an external factor would be what the Chinese classify as "evil wind." There are different ways that "evil wind" can attack the body. An easily understood example is when one practices Tai Chi Chuan and then sits next to the air conditioner. The result could well be headache; stiffness or pain in the shoulders, neck or back; or the common cold.

The responsibility of the acupuncturist is to restore what the internal and external factors have disrupted. Using diagnostics such as tongue diagnosis, pulse diagnosis, smell, hearing, etc., the acupuncturist identifies this deviation in energy as an

actual imbalance or blockage in one or more meridian pathways of the body. This energy can be thought of as water flowing in a river. If there is a heavy rain, then there is an excess of water in the river. Like the water in the river, our bodies can have an excess of energy in the meridians. Again, this is due to internal or external factors. If there is too little rain, then there is a lack of water flowing in the river, and likewise our bodies can have too little energy flowing in the meridians. If the river has been dammed then there is little or no water flowing. Our bodies can also experience a blockage of energy.

The corrective process comes about by the use of moxibustion (heat treatments), acupuncture (needles), acupressure (pressure), cupping (suction) or herbs. It is believed that the treatments actually increase, decrease or open up the flow of energy. For an excess of energy the acupuncturist will disperse the energy. If there is a deficiency of energy the acupuncturist will tonify the energy; and if there is a blockage of energy the acupuncturist will release the blockage.

Most people who have heard of acupuncture are familiar with the meridian system where the acupuncture points are located. However, in addition to the regular or standard pathways, there are internal pathways which actually connect that meridian not only to its respective organ, but to other organs and areas of the body. As an example, the pericardium is the muscle that surrounds the heart. The Pericardium Meridian is classified as a Yin Meridian and runs from the chest to the upper arm and down the inside of the forearm to the middle finger. Problems along the arm, in the chest and around the heart, are treated with the acupuncture points on this meridian. There is also an internal pathway that runs down to the inside of the abdomen. There are no acupuncture points on this internal pathway. However, it has been found that vomiting, stomach-ache, abdominal pain, spasm of the diaphragm, etc., can be treated by using acupuncture point P-6 (Neiguan), located just above the wrist. This is one reason why acupuncturists can treat problems of an organ or area of the

body with a seemingly unrelated point or meridian. These internal pathways also connect the system of meridians into a cohesive unit so there is a flow of energy from one meridian or organ to another meridian or organ.

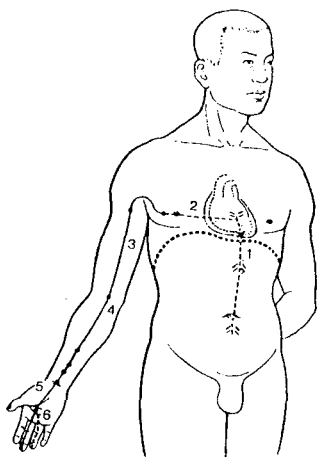
In addition to the above there is the Muscle Meridian System which is believed to be related to the meridian system. The Muscle Meridians travel just below the surface of the body and do not enter into the internal organs. Just as there are Yin and Yang Meridians, there are Yin and Yang Muscle Meridians. They usually start where there are joints and bones and run to the body. When we stretch our bodies or turn the waist, legs or arms, these muscle meridians are stimulated. As an example, the Pericardium Muscle Meridian runs on the Yin surface (inside) of the forearm. If you place your palm in front of your face and gently rotate the wrist so that the palm faces away from the body, you will feel a slight distension or warmth running from the tip of the middle finger down across the palm to the inside area of the elbow. Many acupuncturists believe this is the general pathway of the Pericardium Muscle Meridian. It corresponds very closely with the pathway of the Pericardium Meridian. It is generally thought that the meridian system influences the Muscle Meridian System, and conversely, the Muscle Meridian System influences the meridian system.

In acupuncture the imbalance of energy is corrected through the use of needles, etc. Tai Chi Chuan can also have a similar effect on the body. That is why many acupuncturists practice Tai Chi Chuan and prescribe it for their patients. If a patient is being treated for recurring back pain, the acupuncturist might suggest that the patient learn Tai Chi Chuan. In this way the patient is not just benefitting from the acupuncture, but also receiving the long term lasting effect of Tai Chi Chuan.

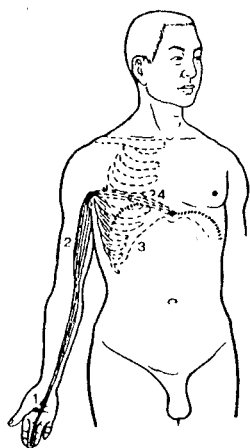
It is believed that those who practice Tai Chi Chuan are actually stimulating the Muscle Meridian System of the body which in turn balances out the energy. Think of the body as a battery in a car. If you leave the car lights on all night, the battery (energy) will be depleted. You can

call a service vehicle to come and give you a quick start (acupuncture) or you can take the battery into the service station and let them put a slow long-lasting trickle charge (Tai Chi Chuan) on it. This is a rather imperfect illustration of the energy building effects of Tai Chi Chuan, but it does convey the idea of the gradual long-lasting benefits of Tai Chi Chuan.

More specifically, Tai Chi Chuan has a beneficial effect on the various systems of the body. For the nervous system Tai Chi Chuan helps reduce stress associated with our active life-styles. When practiced in the morning it will build energy to help carry one through the day; and when practiced after work it calms the mind, releases nervous tension and relaxes the body. Tai Chi Chuan is good for those who suffer from depression, insomnia, tension and nervousness.



The Pericardium Meridian



The Pericardium Muscle Meridian

For the heart and blood vessels the practice of Tai Chi Chuan can have a positive effect when practiced over a long period of time. The Chinese believe that the movements will strengthen the blood vessels and heart muscle, and reduce high blood pressure. Tai Chi Chuan is the perfect exercise for those who suffer from stroke, heart attack, high blood pressure and paralysis.

The movements of Tai Chi Chuan require the turning of the waist, hips and abdomen. Most of the internal organs thus become stimulated. Those suffering from stomach or intestinal problems such as indigestion, ulcers, constipation, diarrhea, etc., are usually helped by Tai Chi Chuan. Many practitioners notice an increase in peristalsis as soon as morning practice is finished.

Because of the balancing of energy, Tai Chi Chuan has been known to be helpful for women in regulating the monthly period, reducing dysmenorrhea and alleviating premenstrual symptoms (PMS), etc. In China many men practice Tai Chi Chuan in the belief that it will alleviate the effects of aging and help with impotency.

In addition to balancing the energy in the various organs of the body, Tai Chi Chuan has a beneficial effect on the muscle and skeletal systems. For many, the most obvious effect of doing Tai Chi Chuan is the improvement in strength and balance. This is seen quite dramatically with those suffering from arthritis of the ankles, hips and knees. Acupuncture reduces the pain and swelling, and Tai Chi Chuan, with its slower balancing effect, helps spread out the time between treatments while improving the strength and mobility of the joints. For many who suffer from arthritis, the combination of acupuncture and Tai Chi Chuan have been the only means of controlling the degenerative disease.

There is a natural process of birth, growth, maturity, aging and death. There is no way to change this process, but acupuncture and Tai Chi Chuan, either separately or together, will help balance out the energy in the body so that each stage of one's life is lived to its fullest.