

Learning to Work with Qi in Toyohari

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I have been practicing for over 30 years. I have been exposed to many styles of acupuncture and have, off and on, wondered about what is actually happening when we are needling a point. Of course, we get asked that a lot by patients, and I have either given a stock answer or stumbled about how difficult it is to explain in biomedical terms. It really is quite a profound question. I believe through my practice of Toyohari Meridian Therapy that this treatment brings awareness to an aspect of a person that he or she has lost touch with, and because of this therapy their vitality is restored.

It is often stressed in talking about diagnosis that it is important to not put ourselves – our judgments, our egos, etc. - in the way. Using the Four Diagnoses as a guide, we need to perceive as clearly as possible and use the map that describes that particular territory - in Toyohari, it is the Five Phase map - and allows access to the qi that needs to be revived. But, the same could be true in needling technique. If what I say is true, even partially, about what happens when I needle, then I need to be very present with the patient and get myself out of the way. I think there is a kind of resonance that happens with the patient that allows the healthy qi to stir and remember what it can be.

These considerations brought me back to consider Chapter 1 of the *Ling Shu*, the first part of which is about needling and perception. It really is an amazing chapter in learning how to work with *qi*. The idea of harmonizing with the patient is there along with the distinctions of skills:

“Ordinary skills of acupuncture maintain the physical body; high skills maintain the spirit, use spirit to reveal the spirit and the guest at the door...Ordinary techniques guard the gates; high techniques control the moving power...On understanding the moving power and its way: the onset of the therapeutic effect is faster than shooting an arrow.”²

This chapter focuses on determining whether the patient is excess or deficient and how to go about addressing those situations. Stress is brought on by the need to make the right choices, use the right techniques, and use the correct timing. It might be easy to pass over the advice to tonify when deficient and drain when excess, but this chapter really conveys that there is much in doing that, and it is the heart of acupuncture to me and to many others. For example, Denmei Shudo quotes the *Ling Shu*:

“The essence of acupuncture is that the effect comes with the arrival of qi. The sign of this is like the wind blowing the clouds away. It becomes clear and bright as if looking into the blue sky.”

This means the purpose of acupuncture has been fulfilled.”³ Then there are the comments of Kodo Fukushima, the founder of the Toyohari Association, on the sensations we can feel from his reading of this chapter:

“[In tonifying] penetration should be natural, as if the needle is being drawn in on its own. Just as a mosquito or horsefly first rests its stinger on the skin of a person and then imperceptibly makes its insertion, so should the needle penetrate the patient’s skin.”⁴

There is so much in this chapter that encourages the development of the skill of working with qi. I want to describe a technique that came about recently how to refine these needling techniques. It is so simple, but can be effective on so many levels. This development happened within the history of Japanese Meridian Therapy. In Japan, in the early part of the 20th century, many acupuncturists were blind for various historical reasons and were taught a system in acupuncture schools for the blind, not based on classics, but on a grid system. There were also some Meridian Therapists who based their acupuncture on the *Nan Jing*. This classic was not accessible to the blind as it was not in Braille at the time. So, some of these blind practitioners formed a study group and had someone read the *Nan Jing* to them, and they began to try to implement this kind of treatment. As part of this process, one of the participants, Katsuyaki Kozato, suggested that they feel the pulses of the person being needled in order to access what was

happening as they were needling. This makes particular sense, as the blind have an especially developed perception through touch. This idea also fits well with what is described in the first chapter of the *Ling Shu*. Thus, they worked on developing their skills in needling and found a way to train other acupuncturists. This study group formed the basis for the later named Toyohari Association, which continued to study the actual effects of different techniques through palpation. They called this pulse feedback the, Kozato hoshiki, or, Kozato study method. Through this method, they carefully studied the effect of needling in the pulse and kept adjusting the actual needle technique to make increasingly effective.

For 11 years, I have been using this method for my own development and as a teaching technique. If someone else or several people are taking the patient's pulse while I am needling and telling me how I am affecting the qi, disturbing it or coming into resonance, my needle technique has a unique opportunity to improve. It really is quite amazing to feel all the nuances of what happens in the pulse as two people are connected with a needle. Small changes make a big difference. It makes the use of the tool very exciting. People can tell you that you are having the desired effect of "clearing the clouds" or if the qi is really improving. You have a chance while you are with the person to make a better connection or find what you are doing that keeps that from happening. Things like correcting your posture, changing the pressure of your hands or needle or clearing your mind of extraneous thoughts are all helpful methods to improve the connection with the patient. It is amazing what you can discover by paying attention. Recently, I had the experience of being with several people who were taking the pulses as someone else was needling. I felt that the needle was not at the best angle to connect with the qi just through the feel of it. I didn't say anything because I wasn't sure how I knew that. After he was finished needling, I told him what I felt, and he said he had been struggling lately to find the best angle. If I had trusted my perception and said it at the time, he would have had a chance to get some guidance and feel the improvement as he found the position that worked better. I find this kind of learning quite thrilling, and the only way to learn this is with practice.

The other aspect of this kind of feedback is that it is humbling. I have felt myself and heard many others bristle at feedback. I think it is common to feel that we know what we are doing, and it is so hard to let in critical evaluation. Yet, this can be part of the process to becoming a more effective healer. We should get out of the way of ourselves and our need to be right so we can just be there simply in resonance with the person we are working with. Other people can often help bring us realize how we are blocking that clarity. Usually we can be better together as a team, than one person alone. It is a marvelous way to use each other to grow in perception and clarity.

Sometimes I have observed myself and others looking for the right protocol or points to treat this or that, or perhaps a “new” technique to get good results. I have come from the study of complex theories and loved that, yet the longer I have been exposed to this Japanese style of treatment, the more I am impressed by how incredibly effective simple observation and response can be. Many techniques are more dramatic and compelling in their own way. Yet some aspects of a deeper and more subtle practice that emphasize on needle technique are quite effective and require of us a different kind of skill development and knowledge. That in itself is part of the intrigue of the study of Toyohari. I am really drawn to the challenge of improving my skills by learning to work with qi through touch in a very nuanced way. I have found that the whole process of treating with acupuncture in this way can enhance what can happen in treatment, bringing awareness to ourselves and the people we treat, and thus, all involved have the opportunity to grow. **OM**