

Quinn's Essentials

Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one. Khalil Gibran

I am on the East Coast in my hometown for a family memorial. We placed the ashes of three of my siblings into the gravesites of my parents, so naturally my thoughts this week turn to the deeper issues of life and death. It is sobering to remember three people who were once so close and who now are gone—gone in a physical way in any event. In another (more) important way the departed live forever in our hearts.

I have been in practice since 1998, so that makes it 27 years—to the month. In that time, I have seen more than a few patients pass from this earthly round to the whatever-comes-next realm. It is always a showstopper; so final, no chance to talk to someone who was always just a phone call away. One person whose seminars I have hosted said that he makes it a practice to visit death three times a day, so that when his time comes, he is already on speaking and familiar terms. Not a bad idea. There is something about death that peels away the façade of everyday life, the nuts-and-bolts version of reality loses its strong grip on us.

We see that Chinese medicine has a lot to offer to patients who are close to transitioning to the next world. NUNM used to have a hospice clinic shift. The facility was not far from school on a beautiful, wooded hillside. Even the parking lot carried the same peaceful atmosphere that one found inside.

The patients and their families were so appreciative for what Chinese medicine offered. It was so touching. You might find it interesting that we used no needles on that shift, not that I think it would necessarily have been a bad idea. Instead, we used the teishin (dizhen) a tiny bit and then did qigong tuina for 15-20 minutes. And this was enough—enough to profoundly shift ungrounded, uneasy shen, enough to free constrained breathing, enough to reduce pain, enough to even bring a smile to weary faces who knew that a new journey would soon be opening for them for which they were trying to prepare themselves.

Experiences like that really bring home the message that we need to see the patient in front of us and not overdo treatment. These patients were barely anchored in this world, i.e., you will not encounter more deficient patients, so the treatment had to be minimalistic. As gentle as the teishin and qigong tuina are, there is still such a thing as too much treatment, even with such minimalistic interventions.

The families of the patients would follow us into the hall after the treatment and ask if we could come every day. The shift was just once a week. They said they had not seen their dad breathe so easily in months or have such a peaceful facial expression or other comments like that. It was heartening. The wish came always to mind that all hospice patients (and I mean ALL, not just those in the US) have access to similar treatment. It is a collective failure of the imagination that our society does not recognize the value of a good death and does not facilitate it occurring. We have such unimaginable wealth in this country and such a poverty of understanding what is important in life. There was ample staff at the hospice, and what they did was medically necessary and we should be grateful for it all, but none of their interventions provided what we were able to provide. The nurses and aides recognized this and commented on it themselves.

Of course, NUNM was the only school where a little qigong tuina was taught and one of the very few where teishin skills are taught. I think for the hospice setting, these are our perfect tools. Blue Poppy's YouTube channel has numerous videos in which I demonstrate how to use a teishin (and related tools), but we have nothing yet on qigong tuina. Let me describe briefly what occurs on a simple gross level when we perform qigong tuina. (see my Clinical Tip blog in this newsletter)

This art has ancient roots in Taoism and could be described a yin – yang manual therapy. We have two fundamental ways of understanding yin – yang: Expansion – Contraction and Movement – Rest. It is too easy to pass over these two pairs and see nothing remarkable, nothing worthy of deeper investigation—certainly nothing worth devoting your life to. But that would be a bad mistake to make, as there is much more to yin – yang than meets the eye at first glance.

Before I go on, let me relate a disappointing aspect of my early TCM education. It was the first term of TCM Theory class, and I had eagerly awaited the evening when we would dive into yin – yang. I had been reading the *Dao de Jing and Yijing* for 20 years at that point in time and knew well that this was a philosophically rich topic that promised to open a new world for me, a new way of living my life. How tragically disappointing then when the teacher devoted just 10-15 minutes to it. She said a person on a mountaintop relative to a person in a valley was in a yang position, but that if a plane flew overhead, the person on the mountaintop would shift to a yin position. And that was it, that was the entire lecture on yin – yang. My mind reeled as I realized that was all she had to say about yin – yang.

To contrast that, let me jump ahead ten years from that experience to being in a group where Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D. told an interesting story. He had used some connections to arrange a meeting with an elderly herbalist. If memory serves, this highly respected elder was 92 at the time. They drank tea and chatted. When Heiner felt their time together was

drawing to a close, he asked the practitioner what he was reading-studying, i.e., scholars in Chinese medicine never stop probing deeper into the theory and practice of our art-science. He expected some insights into something obscure from the *Shang Han Lun*, but instead the herbalist replied: “I am still trying to understand yin – yang.” Bingo! As far as I am concerned that is exactly the guy to study with. This is my mission in life as well—develop my understanding and appreciation of yin-yang as much as I can.

And I want to go one step further to establish (hopefully) that yin – yang is not just a simple way of saying we can divide the universe into two poles. That is how my TCM Theory teacher saw things, but there is a much deeper level. The quote below is from the 50th saying of the Gospel of Thomas, an ancient text that was discovered in 1948. Unlike the canonical gospels, the Thomas Gospel has no narrative, no miracles (although we do read instructions on how to heal in miraculous ways), and no resurrection. Unlike the other gospels it contains 114 sayings (called *logia*, singular *logion*). The 50th saying is below:

If they say to you: Who are you?, say: We are his sons, and we are the elect of the living Father. If they ask you: What is the sign of your Father in you?, say to them: It is movement and rest.

Let me paraphrase based on my understanding: *You show yourselves to be enlightened beings by being able to demonstrate that you understand yin (rest) and yang (movement).* That is clearly attributing a level of importance to yin – yang totally at odds with my TCM Theory teacher’s. However, if we spend time reading the *Dao de Jing*, we come away with an equally strong message about the importance of recognizing that yin and yang are what is occurring around us all the time. Nature “yin-yangs” always and only.

Now contrast that with my TCM Theory teacher and her version of yin – yang. It is akin to comparing a pre-K student to a post-doc student. That is probably an apt description of how far apart they are.

All this is prelude to my explaining the mechanical basics of qigong tuina. We have to start there, but it must be said that qigong tuina is much deeper than the simple nuts-and-bolts of how to do it. Yin – Yang is deep stuff. On the surface it is unimpressive. It looks like little if anything is being done, but if one observes more closely real transformation is occurring. I am known as the teishin guy or the Yin Sotai guy, but it might surprise you to hear me say this: If I were forced to work with one modality only, it would be qigong tuina. Using this modality on its own, I can do the most effective healing.

Go to my Clinical Tip blog in this newsletter to see the rudiments of how to get started with qigong tuina.

Kind regards all around,

Bob Quinn

I have a book out on the teishin that you can purchase from Blue Poppy:

A User's Guide to the Teishin and Enshin: A Quiet Revolution in Traditional East Asian Medicine.

The link is here:

<https://www.bluepoppy.com/A-Users-Guide-to-the-Teishin-and-Enshin/productinfo/BUGTE/>

here is the link to Blue Poppy's wide selection of teishins:

<https://www.bluepoppy.com/Japanese-Tools/departments/107/>