

HEALING WITHOUT HARM

(Pathways to Alternative Medicine)

by

E. G. BARTLETT

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PAPERFRONTS
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INTRODUCTION

Orthodox medicine relies heavily on drugs and surgery. Great successes are claimed for drugs, particularly in the fields of bacterial and parasitic infections; pneumonia and tuberculosis are no longer killer diseases; syphilis is curable. Drugs can relieve pain. Used as anaesthetics they make necessary surgical operations possible. They can prevent disease, as when someone going into a malarial area protects himself with quinine tablets before he sets out. We should never minimize the value of drugs in medicine. Diabetic patients would not be alive without their daily dose of insulin.

Certainly drugs do good, but there is another side. How much of the good attributed to them should rightly be attributed to improved hygiene and living conditions? How much of what we believe is due to companies with vested interests promoting drug therapies?

Drugs also do harm. They can harm the patient in various ways. There are side effects, for example drowsiness from pheno-barbitone, vomiting from digoxin or morphine, male sexual difficulties from drugs used to relieve high blood pressure. There are secondary effects, for example thrush when antibiotics eliminate natural bacterial flora in the bowel. There are toxic effects, not only from overdose, but from ordinary doses given to a patient with an underlying condition. There are adverse reactions between different drugs. The dramatic and disastrous effects of putting drugs on the market before they have been sufficiently tested was highlighted by the thalidomide case. The chemotherapy and the radium treatments used in cancer cases destroy healthy tissue as well as the cancerous growth they are seeking to eliminate, and often the patient suffers from vomiting and loss of appetite. Readers who wish to know more of the adverse effects of drug therapy are referred to Melville and

Johnson's book "Cured to Death" (Secker and Warburg 1982).

As well as the harm they do to man, drugs harm the thousands of laboratory animals on whom they must be tested before they can be released onto the market. In their book "The Medicine You Take" by Drs. D. R. Laurence and J. W. Black (Croom Helm 1978), the authors say "It is hard to doubt that, especially in toxicity testing, a lot of suffering is caused to conscious animals". The authors of this book are not against the tests; they believe them to be necessary. Their admission is therefore the more damning in the eyes of those who believe that they have no right to purchase their own health and happiness at the expense of the well-being of any other of God's creatures.

A moral dilemma clearly exists. Not only are laboratory animals used to test drugs; they are used to develop new skills and to demonstrate old skills to students. The number and the nature of these uses is rightly a matter for public concern. The cruelty involved is sometimes horrific.

Surgery deliberately and sometimes drastically harms the body, to achieve a good end, and it can go wrong. Any treatment that offers the slightest hope of avoiding surgery is therefore worth investigation.

This book is intended for all who seek healing without harm. They may reject our right to use animals for our own ends. They may refuse to accept that any treatment that harms their own body can ultimately do good. They may feel that there is something wrong with conventional medicine. They may have heard of other forms of healing from friends who have benefited. They may be turning elsewhere in despair because past treatment has not helped their case. Whatever their reason, it is worth their while to consider the claims of alternative medicine.

Much of what is called "alternative medicine" is in fact much earlier in origin and use than orthodox medicine, and it adopts a more natural approach to healing. Orthodox medicine treats people when they are ill, and preventive measures take a secondary place. Alternative medicine will treat people when they are well and seeks to prevent them becoming ill.

There are other differences between the two forms. Orthodox medicine mainly attacks the symptoms of the particular malady of which the patient is complaining. The alternative forms treat the whole man, seeking to relate his present condition to his whole life-style, which may need to be changed as part of the cure or to prevent a recurrence of the illness. This approach is of course also taught to orthodox medical students in their early training but it is soon lost when they go into general practice. Alternative medicine rejects synthetic drugs in the main, seeking to use natural remedies and to help the body to heal itself. The methods are gentler in approach to the patient and less violent in their action on his body.

Critics of these alternative forms point out that many of them are without scientific foundation. The meridians of Ch'i used in acupuncture for example, cannot be identified in anatomy. Nor can some of these alternative forms be subjected to the clinical tests that doctors impose on more orthodox treatments. Doctors will often use a placebo in their tests for example. This consists of giving one set of patients a drug whilst giving to another a substance that appears identical but which has no curative properties whatever. The results can then be compared. But such therapies as chiropractic, osteopathy or faith healing could never be tested in a similar way, because it is impossible to give fake adjustments to the spine or fake faith healing.

In this book, we shall look at the forms of alternative medicine that are generally available. Some, such as acupuncture, homoeopathy, herbalism, and naturopathy are well known and treat all kinds of illness. Others, such as aroma therapy are aids to healing rather than complete healing systems in themselves. Many practitioners of these alternative therapies do not like the use of the word "alternative", because it suggests a choice between one or the other. Some will easily combine with orthodox medical treatment, and certainly many of the alternative therapies will combine with each other.

This is in no sense a "Treat Yourself" book. Though you might use some of the methods (The Bach Flower Remedies for example), it might be positively dangerous to attempt to

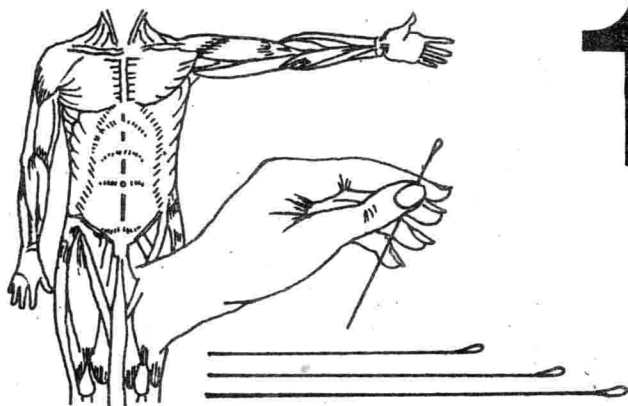
use some of the other techniques on yourself. The book is intended to be a guide to what is available for different purposes and to those bodies who can put you in touch with qualified practitioners. No attempt has been made to judge or assess the value of the therapies. In some cases the only possible way of judging would be to try them for yourself. The aim here is simply to present the history, philosophy, methods and claims of each system in turn, so that the reader can choose those he thinks worthy of further investigation.

Of these therapies, only homoeopathy is available on the National Health Service. Other treatments can be expensive, since they come within the private sector. It is therefore worth enquiring the fee before you start a course of treatment.

An advantage of going to an alternative therapist, however, is that he is likely to have more time to delve into the underlying causes of your complaint than a busy N.H.S. practitioner with a full surgery and a round of house calls waiting. The average time allowed per patient by a busy doctor is ten minutes; the minimum time with an alternative practitioner will be fifteen minutes and may well be up to a couple of hours.

Orthodox medicine tends to be severely mechanistic in its concepts, carrying over the materialistic thought of the last century. Even psychosomatic illness took some time to be recognised, and the term was being used scornfully as late as the 1950's. The relation of the spiritual element to total health is even less likely to interest doctors who have been taught that illness has physical causes and physical cures. Many of the alternative therapies bring the spiritual element to the fore, identifying healing as an activity of a benevolent life-force in the Universe, by whatever name it may be called, and seeking harmony with the teachings of the great world religions.

The approach of all the therapies in this book is holistic and gentle. Administered by properly qualified practitioners, none of them should cause harm. None of them involves experiments on animals. If treatment you have received in the past has not helped you, or if, on moral or ethical grounds, you seek healing without harm, it is worth reading further.



ACUPUNCTURE AND ACUPRESSURE

Acupuncture is one of the oldest forms of treatment. It is Chinese in origin, and dates back to at least 2697 B.C. when Huang Ti, the Father of Acupuncture, succeeded Shen Nung as Emperor. Huan Ti, with his doctor Ch'i Po, worked out the principles of anatomy and health on which the theory and practice of acupuncture is based. They were written down in a book called "Nei Ching", which has been translated as "The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine": The book is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the principles of medicine in relation to the Universe, the second with the actual practice of Acupuncture.

In 1822, a Court Decree struck acupuncture from the curriculum of the Imperial Medical College and it fell into disrepute and came to be practised by charlatans, though genuine practitioners still abounded, passing on their knowledge outside the medical colleges. During Chiang Kai

Shek's reign in China, acupuncture again suffered disfavour with the authorities. Chiang tried to introduce Western medicine, and rather than risk the displeasure of his Government, which could have extremely unpleasant consequences, doctors began to study these new methods. But traditional medicine was so deep-rooted in the people's esteem and its practitioners were so much more numerous than Western-style physicians, that acupuncture remained the principal source of treatment for the majority of the people.

When the Communist revolution brought Chairman Mao to power, he saw the hold acupuncture had on the people's faith, and he saw too that in purely practical terms there were not enough Western-style doctors to go round, and he again encouraged traditional medicine. Both traditional and Western medicine flourish in China today, and patients visiting a clinic will be given the choice as to which treatment they prefer.

Acupuncture is a holistic system of healing, in that it treats the whole man, not just his present condition. It is a system in tune with the Universe, and to understand it, we must understand something of Chinese philosophy.

The Chinese believe that there exists an invisible and indefinable life-force, to which they give the name "Ch'i". It is the motivating force behind the Universe, and has two forms of expression, Yin and Yang. All matter, including the human body and every part of it, is made up of Yin and Yang. Yin is the negative, yielding, feminine side of things; Yang is the positive, dominating, masculine.

Ch'i, the life-force, comes into the body at birth and leaves it at death. It flows around a system of meridians that extend through the torso and the limbs. These meridians are neither blood vessels nor nerves nor anything physical, and for this reason their very existence has been scoffed at by Western scientists. But the fact that neither the meridians nor Yin and Yang nor even Ch'i itself can be proved to exist is irrelevant, when the system of healing based on these concepts has worked for over 6000 years and still works today. Whatever names we give to these phenomena and however much they defy pinning down by laboratory tests, they are concepts

that produce supremely practical results in terms of healing.

The flow of Ch'i in a man's body is not constant. It varies with the seasons, with the time of day, and even with the weather. Yin and Yang forever fluctuate, and for health they need not be equal in any part of the body; they need only be in the right balance. Illness, according to this philosophy, results from an imbalance of Yin and Yang, and is cured by restoring the balance, by use of the acupuncturist's needles.

Chinese philosophy teaches that Yin and Yang produce the five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal and water. Acupuncture theory links these five elements with the liver, the heart, the spleen, the lungs and the kidneys respectively. These are called solid organs; they have Yin characteristics, and their functions are internal.

Each of these solid organs has a corresponding hollow organ: the gall-bladder, the small intestine, the stomach, the large intestine, and the bladder. These are Yang in character.

According to the theory of acupuncture, there are two more organs in the body, neither of them known to Western medicine. These are "The Triple Warmer", a Yang organ, which has no definite form, but is simply a regulator of the flow of fluids between the other organs, and "The Gate of Life", a Yang organ said to be situated between the kidneys and to be the regulator of sex and circulation.

The acupuncturist sees man as fitting into the rhythms of the Universe, such as the seasonal rhythms, for example. Spring is a time of new beginning. New shoots come forth in the earth; they develop in Summer; they fruit in the Autumn; they die away in Winter. Spring is linked with wood and with the liver; Summer with fire and the heart; early Autumn with earth and the spleen; late Autumn with metal and the lungs; Winter with water and the kidneys. Just as there is an interaction between the seasons, one developing into the other, so there is interaction between the five elements and between the five organs of the body. As water destroys fire, so the kidneys can have a bad effect on the heart. As wood nourishes a fire, so the liver can have a good effect on the heart. This is simplifying the case of course, but it illustrates the kind of interaction the acupuncturist will consider when dealing with his patients.