

WHAT ARE WE REALLY DOING?

Heather Bruce

After ten years of dispensing health care and advice, the birth of my third child presented me not with the planned motherhood and opportunity to write acupuncture texts but a plunge into the ranks of health-care consumers.

Skye was eventually diagnosed as having had suspected herpes encephalitis contracted probably in utero, and very nearly died.

She survived due to the marvels of medical technology and pharmacology which, coupled with a culture bereft of common-sense and medical ethics, leads to human life being saved at any cost — in her case massive and extensive brain injury, with no hope of a healthy, happy and/or productive life.

Her prognosis was blindness, deafness, massive cerebral palsy, massive epilepsy and profound intellectual impairment. Her medical treatment was symptom management, and her expected quality of life was left to chance. I was advised to "wait and see", to "learn to live each day at a time" and to "never expect anything of her".

A child massively burnt is not saved from infection and given comfort drugs, then left with untreated scarring. Years of reconstructive surgery and on-going support are considered necessary. It is expected by all that this opportunity for improved quality of life will be provided at all costs, and parents not availing the child of the opportunity to be as comfortable and normal as possible would be considered negligent, and possibly be relieved of their parental duties.

Those, however, with non-body wounds (i.e. inside the head), are left to chance, once survival and symptom management are established. As an alternative therapist, I saw her condition as entirely obvious, and entirely 'fixable', utilizing my personal belief that anything is possible and the belief in the body's ability to heal itself, especially at such a young age, given the right circumstances.

I did not hold the belief/expectation that the 'experts' could help in any way. I was not bound to doctors and specialists in allied fields having any answers, they'd told me that there was no hope, she'd never live in our world, she'd never be normal, or ever pass for normal at a glance. Given this degree of limitation and handicap, (their reality for her and me), why would I consult them, or include them in my reality (anything is possible, and the body and soul have infinite capacity for self-healing)?

This story is about not limiting the outcome, and working outside our personal and cultural constraints, and allowing the path of another, under guidance and with limitless unseen assistance, to unfold.

This is not the story of an obsessional mother hellbent on proving everyone wrong, but an inspiration for all those who are faced either personally or professionally with hopelessness, and who choose to cast it aside, to really deal with living in the reality of now. Moment to moment, outside the guilt and grief of the past; the worry, anguish and fears for the future, now is where the next second bases its existence and form, and from there onwards, we choose our future in our every 'now' moment.

This is not to ignore the feelings and emotions we feel now, it's to work with them now, not carry them onwards as baggage. To question the belief structure that allows us to judge these feelings and emotions as 'good' or 'bad', and react emotionally

accordingly, and hence limit the outcome of our ongoing reality.

As a practitioner, I saw patients with MS, ME, cancer and AIDS, or any other 'hopeless' condition, as having an opportunity to really change themselves, not to be done to by specialists, but as a co-operative experience by those who have the knowledge and wisdom and belief and motivation, to all aid the individual to another space, whatever it may be.

The cancer inside a person has been lovingly grown and nourished on all levels (not necessarily conscious) of that person, to push that person to a different reality. The perception of the experience to a large extent determining the outcome of the event.

Skye was like the cancer. We could cut it out/irradiate/kill it. Forget she ever existed, leave her in hospital, accept the judges' decision. The futility of trying anything besides physical maintenance. Or alternatively we could "fix" the cancer, by focussing on her and her solely, ignoring the body which lovingly nourished it to being (our family and its "other" realities), or, we could lovingly accept it all, and work simultaneously on accepting and changing her reality and ability to perceive herself and the world, whilst engaging in the same processes for ourselves, just as some patients choose the path of self-responsibility in their own self-healing.

As a parent, I desperately wanted the perfect daughter I'd grown inside me to emerge and blossom forth, under my guidance, to become healed, and whole. It was/is not in my script to be the object of pity, a victim accepting my lot of hope/helplessness.

As a practitioner/parent I wanted to be able to "fix" my daughter, to be outside the process, the "icky" stuff, the feeling, the hope/despair/elation/depression/exhaustion/illness/the traps of having an alternative agenda, my personal desire for a specific outcome.

I have found that I cannot do this. I am bonded to this little person on more levels than to any other being. I face a duality; stepping outside the "real" world that others see and working on the inner levels of healing, and stepping back from observer to totally absorbed participant who is the key player as the bridge for one person to live and learn to experience the world as we know it.

My ability to do this has been largely attributable to my inner beliefs, and the framework given to me through experiencing, not just knowing, TCM. Knowledge on an inner level, gained from working with patients over the years, coupled with my intellectual conceptualizations; which has enabled me to see the duality of all; the structive/physical/material/yin side, the focus of our scien-

ific/rational culture/mindset, and how this focus sets up to be "professional" and "acceptable" and the energy/active/essence/'yang' side, that part scoffed at by our rationality, the shaman, medicine man, wise woman, together the totality of the healing experience the "religious" and the "medical" form our human experiences in sickness and in health.

Once, when treating a paraplegic patient, he soon felt pins and needles in his feet, and imagined he could feel his legs, and one day he decided he could move his leg, from dangling over the edge of the chair, to fully extended. Which he did. His parents and doctors instantly stopped him coming for treatment, as it was giving him "false hope".

I always felt (due to the incredible strength of his muscle spasms, and the pain around the site of the break) that I 'just' had to get rid of the wind, and clear the obstruction out of Du Mai, and after a bit of 'tidy-up' he'd be walking again. I didn't say that, but I didn't limit the outcome of possibility, and suggested that he have an open mind also.

So too with my daughter, or anyone caught in hopelessness and medical impossibility. The medical version of their prognosis is based on the medical understanding and experience from the medical framework that deals with one side of the duality of existence; the actual physicality. The side the shamans/religious healers, and those considered 'quacks' are utilizing, is the other side of the duality; working with the spirit, or *shen*.

The body follows the path laid out by the *shen*. The *shen* on two levels; the little bit we all have, which in its human form is 'yang' in relation to the body, but 'yin', the finite, more structurally part, of the greater whole from which it came and upwards on every level. Just as blood follows *qi*, energy follows thought, and the physical and energetic manifestations we perceive are following another plan, that of *shen* and spirit.

In all cases, I believe this is where the 'healing' or change is necessary. The modern medical framework that I feel we are now emulating, focuses on signs and symptoms, of cataloguing physical and energetic manifestations into categories, and from there treating the category, not the human being, who exists on all levels.

The real reason for the whole scenario the patient experiences is not due to constitutional weak Kidney *jing*, Liver *yin* insufficiency, poor *qi* and blood production and circulation, or phlegm misting the consciousness. This is how the system manifests its disorder. Why the spirit on all levels set it up, why the individual goes down her own path to experience her perceptions of her disharmony, is the real reason, and I feel unless we as TCM practitioners integrate ourselves, and our perception of TCM to fit the human condition as a whole, we at best will be good technicians.

The band-aids we apply with our techniques and medicines may be a step back from where medicine works, but without our acknowledgement of the symptomatic nature of our patching up, without allowing ourselves and our patients the space to explore beyond the bit that's 'gone wrong', how are they (and we) really going to transcend the ill health cycle?

Being Skye's mother has been my greatest life's lesson to date. To work with, and for her, only on the physical would have not allowed the incredible shifts that she has experienced to occur from her original prognosis. She now 'passes for normal' (except for the autistic air of other-worldliness). The task is not complete and she is only four and a half years old.

The TCM framework, and a gungho needle and herb freak,

would have attended to the dramas we've been through, boots and all. The issues my daughter has been confronting have physical manifestations, and have been dramatically life-threatening. The whole point is that the physical is only the stage. The play is being written and directed on another level. She often rethinks whether or not to continue in the physical, and at what level of functioning, and is, to all other observers, just being "brain injured" and "autistic".

The greatest lesson she has taught me (through the experience of heart and gut reactions and responses) is the wisdom of standing back, of not rushing in, with ego and arrogance that "I" know best but to allow the other the space to experience their pain, their life, and their lessons, with my loving, supportive, informed presence guiding where necessary.

Skye has shown me how to transcend my own handicaps (belief structures). Her labels (blindness, deafness, cerebral palsy, brain injury, profound intellectual impairment, autism), have been matched by my own (e.g. pride, independence, lack of faith in universal providence). As I work with hers, I work through mine. As I heal and change myself, she changes. Is this due to the "placebo" effect? Is it as I perceive her differently, I treat her differently and respond differently, and hence give her space to change, or does her shift instigate mine? Who cares ultimately if the desired change happens due to a belief that it will, and the physical vehicle was the catalyst i.e. it cannot be seen to reliably change myriads of other 'same' situations? Who cares, as were they really the 'same' anyway? Of course not, as we humans are all different from each other, and ourselves at any given moment.

Recently Skye went on one of her integrative holidays from life and did such a good job she was on a drip in hospital to enable the living process to go on whilst she hibernated. Changes occurred within that being which were allowed and encouraged by the loving non-judgemental acceptance of those around her. She chose to stay, and lives again. It is a very difficult thing for one so damaged who hides behind acute autism, after the fog of massive brain injury has lifted, to experience people and life. I respect her challenge.

I confronted the imminent death or further brain injury of my child anew. The guilt I go through in not treating her as a physical entity only is immense. However this is my personality/ego confrontation. I am also a very bonded mother, who has allowed the process of reintegration and neurological recovery by the very processes I utilized in the near death experience, working with the spirit that is directing the body, rather than focusing solely on the body. This is not to ignore the body, but in the case of an autistic person, the body and its messages are the trigger for total freakout, and hence even touching can trigger withdrawal.

Her desire to not move her bowels is a case in point. It is not 'constipation', physiological. It seems to be a desire to make some sense of the world, by having something that she has control over. The struggle she faces is reality. To live is to allow opening and letting go, and accept new life and trust that self won't shatter in the process.

To force her to move her bowels, to force her to ingest anything, to force touching on her at that point intensifies the very fragile being's perception of invasion, a lack of self assertion, the very issue that is physically manifesting. I have been put in a situation where I must use the theory beyond the tools I'd normally use, no herbs, no needles, no

The choice to watch and wait, acknowledging the further damage to the physical with the process in TCM terms, to allow

her to take herself to the limit and to not intervene, was to accept that her soul knew what was best for her being at that time. To live my grief, my guilt, my exhaustion, my emotionality, and my physical responses to the turmoil I feel, is my part of the process.

I watch her suffering, her misery, her anger, her frustration, her fright, her withdrawal, and her incredibly tentative glimpses of reaching out, of opening her barriers, her attempts to trust enough to try again. It's at her speed, and down her path. I can guide and support, but forcing and pointing her towards where I want her, eventually causes trauma. The parallel is there for me to observe my previous behaviour and personal needs as a student, a therapist, a teacher, without questioning "why", a robot on automatic fix-it mode.

I now attend acupuncture seminars, read magazines and books again, and I see others on the same path. A quick fix with St36, Sp6 and relevant herbs. Who are we kidding?

Who are we to say that we can 'fix' anything? The sore back the patient has may have been set up to catalyze inner changes to self awareness - to explore victim consciousness, powerlessness, physical suffering and agony, personal power through taking self-responsibility, learning to stand outside acceptable and safe frameworks, and to stretch themselves onwards. I feel that it is the patient who chooses the shackles and it is the patient who chooses to carry them on or release them, and that our path is to acknowledge that we are also as them, and our path is to support, guide, and grow along with them.

Heather Bruce is a teacher and practitioner of Chinese Medicine in Brisbane, Queensland

CLINIC FOR LEASE

RED HILL, Brisbane

Next to established organic grocer

25m²

suitable for 2 cubicles + reception area
also use of exterior paved courtyard

\$165.00 per week + outgoings

Telephone (07) 369 2470
or (018) 88 0973

The Register of Acupuncture and TCM

PO Box 344 Double Bay NSW 2028 ph (02) 969 6961

The Register is pleased to announce that we have more than doubled our membership over the past year, and are looking forward to the seminar program in 1992. Thanks to all those who made 1991 a big success for the RATCM and TCM profession, especially Cathy Davitt, Greg Doyle, Paul Nebauer, and the eminent practitioners of Australia.

he final Seminar for 1991 will be given by Peter Townsend on "Honing your diagnostic and palpatory skills". Peter is an expert on Kanpo medicine and abdominal diagnosis. The seminar is on October 13 (Sunday) at 1pm at the YWCA, Sydney.

The Annual General Meeting of the Register will be held at the YWCA Sydney (cnr of Wentworth Ave and Liverpool St) at 4pm on Sunday October 13.