



Media Spotlight

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR MEDIA

SPECIAL REPORT

ACUPUNCTURE

MAGIC OR MEDICAL SCIENCE?

by Albert James Dager



Acupuncture, though enjoying a growing acceptance in the West only since the early part of this century, has been practiced in the Orient from 3,000 to 5,000 years (depending upon whose history is accurate). According to the late historian and metaphysicist Aldous Huxley, news of acupuncture was first brought to the West by Jesuit missionaries whose glowing accounts spurred the curiosity of western medical practitioners to further investigation.¹

The idea that by inserting a needle into the foot one can cure a disease of the bladder is certainly cause for curiosity. But the fact is that acupuncture is being learned by doctors in the West who see it as a viable supplement to their traditional medicine in the treatment of many disorders.

But what, exactly, is acupuncture? And how is it purported to work where other methods fail?

THE THEORY

According to practitioners of acupuncture (Latin: *acus* [needle] + *punctura* [puncture]), "the body is lined with invisible energy channels called meridians," which are related to various organs of the body. In classical Chinese medicine there are fourteen major and eight special meridians. Twelve of the major meridians correspond to the twelve major pulses: lung, large intestine, stomach, spleen, heart, small intestine, bladder, kidney, liver, gall bladder, circulation-sex and triple warmer (nervous energy and warmth).²

The remaining two major meridians are the Governing Vessel, and the Conception Vessel. The first is said to run upwards from the base of the spine over the top of

the head, ending at the middle of the roof of the mouth; the second starts near the perineum, goes up the middle front of the body, and ends at the top of the tongue.³

The meridians form a network called *Ching-Lo*. *Ching* refers to the vertical meridians; *Lo* refers to those that go around the body and intersect the vertical meridians at specific points.⁴

The connection between the diseased organ and the particular part of the skin in which pain is registered is said to be due to both being supplied with nerves from the same nerve segment. According to the theory of acupuncture there are about a thousand points in the skin, approximately a tenth of an inch in diameter. When an organ is diseased the corresponding points become tender under pressure. These acupuncture points essentially form twelve groups aligned along the meridians running along the major parts of the body (trunk, head, arms, and legs), terminating at the tips of the fingers or toes.⁵

By stimulating the points along the meridian connected to the ailing organ, it is said that the acupuncturist causes a nerve impulse to be sent directly to the brain. The brain then interprets and acts on that impulse, affecting the inflicted part of the body through the central nervous system.⁶

Besides the use of needles there are a number of ways to stimulate these points including electricity, moxa (heat), laser, injection, and finger pressure (acupressure).⁷

The theory of acupuncture appears to be in harmony with medical science. However, it's the philosophy upon which this theory is based that presents a problem.

THE PHILOSOPHY

According to acupuncturist and author James B. Howland, "We tend to think of acupuncture as a very focused, technical treatment, perhaps something akin to flipping on or off tiny electrical switches with

fine needles. Yet more important than the complex technical details of the needle-work itself is the philosophic overview which guides it."⁸

Acupuncture originated in Taoism, an eastern religious philosophy which perceives the universe as activated by two principles—the Yin and the Yang. Yin and Yang are said to be evidenced in dark and light, night and day, cold and hot, sweet and sour, left and right, up and down, female and male. These two principles are represented in the Tai Chi diagram—a circle with intertwining elements of black and white, each with a dot in the center to represent an androgynous nature.

Yin and Yang—though different from each other—are said to be cohesive in the sense that each creates the other. It represents a circular or cyclic understanding of the universe, as opposed to the linear western concept of forces in opposition to each other. Neither, whether good or bad, is to be avoided, but understood in their constant change from one state to the other.

The Force of *Star Wars*, is an example of Yin and Yang at work. The Force is comprised of both a dark side and a light side, each the complement of the other, and each necessary for the existence of the other.

In terms of human, animal and plant life, Yin and Yang finds expression in the so-called "life-force"—the "god within" to which eastern metaphysics directs its adherents in meditation. Thus, the same principles that guide the oriental martial arts practitioner also guide the oriental healing arts practitioner.⁹ Both are closely related; both attempt to achieve balance in the state of being for the whole person.

The eastern philosophy of medicine differs from the western in that the eastern is based on a monistic concept of the universe, whereas the western is based on a dualistic concept. That is, western philosophy sees each element of the universe as working together to form the whole, yet separate in nature and in kind. Eastern philosophy is based on the Taoist view of the universe, seeing reality as one unitary, organic whole with no independent parts. Thus, God is nature and nature is God. In this sense, man is perceived as part of God, and God as part of man.

Tao means "Way." Not a way, but the Way—the Way of Harmony. We see the Taoist concept of a universal life-force in today's holistic (or wholistic) health practices which purport to treat the patient as a

