

Applying the Method of Emptying the Mind Whilst Filling the Abdomen to Enhance the Effect of Acupuncture in Clinical Practice

by Dr. Bisong Guo

The treatment of difficult, complicated and chronic cases of illness by traditional acupuncture and moxibustion normally needs to take place daily or every other day in order to regulate the flow of qi, blood, yin and yang and achieve effective results. The medical system in the West, however, is different from that in China, with fewer doctors practising acupuncture and many patients requesting treatment. It is therefore almost impossible to see patients as frequently as this. Under these circumstances, how can we ensure that treatments given once a week, or even every other week, can achieve the same effect as more frequent treatment? I am pleased that I have some experience concerning the above-mentioned problem to share with you.

I believe that the aim of maximising results can be achieved by applying the method of 'emptying the mind while filling the abdomen' during acupuncture treatment, as well as by advising patients on how to maintain this practice in their daily life.

Lao Zi in the *Dao De Jing* advocated "emptying the mind while filling the abdomen", which I hold to be an important principle of qigong practice. To empty the mind means to bring it into a carefree and joyous state. To fill the abdomen means to enrich the genuine qi of dantian (in the region of Qihai REN-6 on the abdomen). In other words, it is essential to totally relax, to enter a tranquil mental state free from stray thoughts, and full of joy and relaxation, and to inhale qi into the dantian to enrich the qi there. By so doing, the channels throughout the body are cleared, promoting the circulation of qi and blood. Kidney fire is therefore activated, and Heart fluid sufficient. Proper interaction between the Heart and the Kidney ensues, leading to abundance of water and fire. The functioning of the whole body is regulated, balanced and stabilised. In the *Zhi You Zi*, Zuo Wangpian said that when one's mind is empty, one feels relaxed; when one is relaxed, Dao is spontaneously produced. In other words, when one is in a tranquil state of mind, the excitation of the

brain starts to disappear and a person enters a state of profound quietude. Lower abdominal breathing leads to the gathering of the energy so that Qihai is enriched and the physiological balance between yin and yang can be attained.

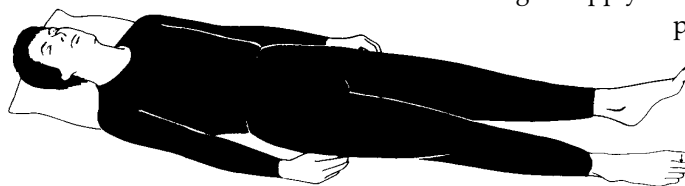
By contrast, Western education advocates activating one's thinking, promoting respiration in the lungs and accelerating the pace of life. The majority of people breathe into the thoracic cavity. Tension built up in work causes frequent stuffiness in breathing, and tightness in the muscles means that inhalation is deeper than exhalation. In addition, lack of knowledge of Chinese medicine leads to fear and nervousness of acupuncture. All these factors have an impact on the efficacy of acupuncture in clinical practice.

On the initial visit of patients who have never had any previous experience of acupuncture, I tell them that in the first place they will have to undergo an acupressure diagnosis. I ask them to close their eyes and relax, and when they feel pain, to breathe out rather than breathe in. I then apply an acupressure diagnosis along the fourteen channels. This involves palpating along the points of the channels in the order of their circulation, paying attention to tenderness and pain, empty or sunken areas, spasm etc. As qi and blood are activated, the patient clearly starts to feel better. At this

stage I apply acupuncture, after which the patient is totally relaxed. I

now verbally guide the patient, asking them to smile and to relax even more deeply so as to empty the mind and to start concentrating their

attention around their abdomen, leading to deep abdominal breathing. The patient is then guided to enter a state where the mind is placed on the mere existence of the abdomen. As a result, they feel that their whole body seems to be floating and to vanish. Meanwhile, they are expected to continue taking deep breaths, resulting in intestinal gurgling sounds showing that the abdomen is relaxed and is flowing freely. The patient maintains this deep state of relaxation for between half an hour and an hour. When the needles are



withdrawn, the beneficial effects are very evident. The symptoms of some sensitive patients may even disappear after acupressure without the need to use needles.

Two typical cases

1. Female, age 24.

Chief complaint: entirely worn-out, headache, body feels heavy, confined to a wheelchair.

Symptoms: both legs powerless when standing upright, pale complexion, failing memory, difficulty in concentrating, feeling sleepy for three months, lack of qi (vital energy), weak pulse, swollen and pale-coloured tongue, thin and white tongue coating.

Diagnosis: Spleen yang deficiency caused by excessive tension built up in work and study.

Treatment: i. acupressure through circulating channels as described above, ii. the method of emptying the mind while filling the abdomen, iii. acupuncture at Qihai REN-6, Zusanli ST-36, Sanyinjiao SP-6 and Shanzhong REN-17. After the first treatment, the symptoms were alleviated, the headache reduced and she felt stronger. After the next two treatments, when acupuncture was not used, she no longer required the wheelchair and was basically recovered. After the fourth visit during which the method of emptying the mind while filling the abdomen was utilised and external qi applied, Kate was fully recovered.

2. Male, age 74.

Complaint: Asthma for 15 years.

He had previously seen a variety of specialists and taken various kinds of medicine. Before the first visit he had been treated with homeopathy. There was a little improvement but no sign of full recovery.

Symptoms: Asthma occurs at any time and in any situation. When severe, he has to raise his shoulders and his mouth opens. The skin on the front of his arms turns purple, and he generally has serious problems in daily life and sleep. When he has a severe attack, a kind of minor apoplexy syndrome occurs. He has a bad temper and red face and cheeks. His pulse is string-tight and rolling, and his tongue is dark blue with dark subglossal veins and a smooth tongue coating.

Diagnosis: insufficiency of Lung yin, deficiency of Liver and Kidney yin, Lung qi obstructed and Heart blood stagnant.

Principle of treatment: soothe the Liver, regulate qi, invigorate the circulation of blood, nourish the Kidneys and Lung.

Treatment: First I talked to the patient for 15 minutes, telling him how the treatment would go and how he could cooperate, as well as the importance of relaxing and breathing. Then he was asked to lie on his back. At first, he explained that he could not lie down but had to sit up in order to breathe. Therefore the method of acupressure through circulating channels as described above was used, mainly applied at points such as Dingchuan (Extra), Feishu BL-13, Shenhu DU-12 etc. Afterwards he could lie on his back. Then acupuncture was applied at Qingling HE-2

(rapid needling with no retention), which was followed by intestinal gurgling sounds. After needling at Shanzhong REN-17, Lieque LU-7 (unilateral), Zhaohai KID-6 (unilateral), Taichong LIV-3 (rapid needling), Shousanli L.I.-10 (unilateral) and Qiuxu GB-40 (unilateral), I told him to close his eyes and practise breathing through his abdomen. He started to relax and to practise abdominal respiration. In about half an hour to 40 minutes, the needles were withdrawn and treatment finished. The patient was now able to breathe normally. After his third visit, he was no longer dependent on his inhaler. The fourth visit simply terminated all his symptoms.

In both cases treatment was given weekly.