

CHOICE WORDS with acupuncturist and yoga instructor Tricia Miller

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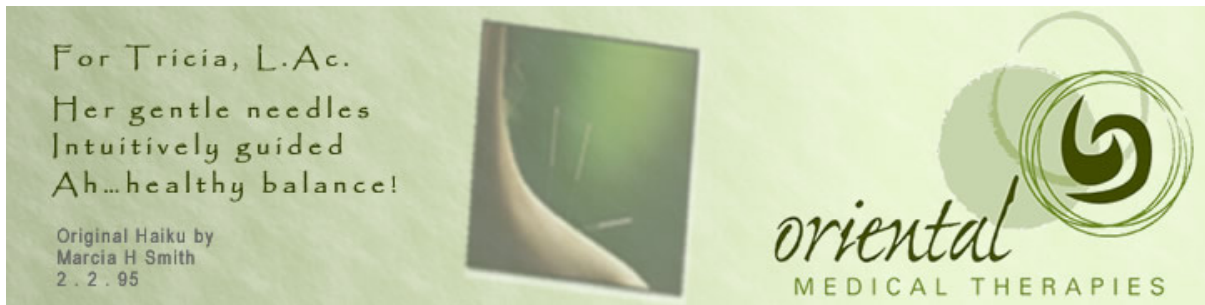
Licensed acupuncturist Tricia Miller has been practicing yoga and the 5,000-year-old art of acupuncture for the past two decades. *Currents* gets an inside peek into the science of our body's energy and the philosophies behind Oriental medicine.



So, let's talk about acupuncture. Well, acupuncture is an Oriental medicine based on the concept of Qi. Qi is the electrical energy that flows along very specific pathways throughout the body. Sometimes these pathways become blocked from stress or disease, and must be treated in order to let the body repair itself. One analogy that is often used with acupuncture, is "the hose." If you have a kink in a hose then water can't flow through and it gets backed up. So acupuncture concentrates on removing these blockages of energy, which allows the body to repair itself and return to a natural state of equilibrium.

What would a normal acupuncture session be like? I use heat therapy and aromatherapy oils, which have a major relaxation effect on the brain, then I use acupressure as a diagnostic tool on the body, and acupuncture as the primary treatment modality. Then I do some therapeutic massage to assist the release of energy.

So, I guess the major question is, do the needles really hurt? The sterilized disposable needles I use are hair-like in diameter, so it's not painful to have acupuncture. It's a very relaxing experience. The person who is experiencing the acupuncture treatment may even feel a split second of electricity because the needles do make that direct connection to that electricity in the body.



This morning I decided to indulge in an all-American fast food dream brunch, so I went and got a No. 1 at McDonalds: a Big Mac, fries and a coke. That was your breakfast? (laughs) How do you feel?

I really don't feel all too bad. Well, you have youth on your side, and the body is very forgiving. The body is an amazing machine, actually, but ultimately everything in life is about moderation. That is an essential principle to finding a balance in the body. The Buddhists say that the path to enlightenment is the line between all opposite extremes, finding your internal balance. With all of the abuses that we put our bodies through, there is a tremendous amount of excess in our lives, so that's what throws us out of balance.

When I think of excess, I think of the 1980s. What are some things that people can simply do for themselves to live their lives more healthily? Proper breathing, proper movement and proper nutrition. Overall, Oriental medicine is about your daily lifestyle and the habits that contribute to your health and well-being of your body. So of course drinking lots of fluids is important, exercise, posture, proper breathing techniques. Yoga is a very powerful tool for understanding how to move the breath through the body.

So you concentrate on the art of yoga as well? I always say that yoga is my passion and acupuncture is my love. So I incorporate a lot of the yoga ideas into my practice and educate my clients about posture, alignment and how they can take care of themselves depending upon their individual situation.

So acupuncture is pretty flexible as it suits people's current needs? Oh yes. For example, we are moving into the winter season here, and the stresses of the winter season lower the body's defenses. So acupuncture can be very effective for building the immune system and assisting our body's transition into the seasons. Oriental medicine is really the original system of preventative health care; the idea is to treat the body before disease sets in. It is important for people to understand that it is much more than just pain management; it can treat more serious internal conditions as well. There has been a lot of research over the past decade that the National Institute of Health has funded supporting acupuncture as an effective tool for treating infertility, fibromyalgia and muscle and joint problems, just to name a few. I mean, even after 20 years of practicing I'm still dazzled when I see the results.

- Interview and photo by Joel Fernando