

The Awakening of Choice

by Lonny S. Jarrett

Abstract

The following article is abstracted from Lonny's new book in progress *The Absolute Practice of Medicine*.

The only true medicine is consciousness awakening to its self. What a surprise when we discover that what is seeking is what's being sought for.

I have always recognized consciousness and spirit to be primary in the creation, sustenance, and development of the universe. My fundamental interest in medicine is in the degree to which it can support the liberation, and evolution, of consciousness in the individual and the collective. The increasing sense of urgency and passion I feel in this regard is motivated by the recognition that the serious survival challenges that now confront us are, at this point in our species evolution, a matter of human choice. The ability of human beings to make conscious choices is the most significant capacity the universe has manifested in its 14 billion years of development. In a concrete sense, the evolution of consciousness means that, over time, choices are grounded in value systems of increasing integrity and wholeness.¹

A most significant part of healing lies in the renunciation of the victim position and the assumption of 100% responsibility for ourselves as embodied by the actual choices that we make. A goal of any healer in a spiritual tradition of medicine, one that recognizes the primacy of spirit, must be to assist in liberating the patient's choosing faculty from the fears and desires of the ego.² Simply put, freedom means "free to choose" as opposed to being a slave to the mechanism of a conditioned mind. Free to choose what? Free to do the right thing.

When it comes to the "spiritual practice of medicine," positive change in behavior is far more significant in assessing efficacy than a change in a patient's feeling state.

The establishment of consciously willed integrity is the highest goal of any true holistic or integral medicine. This implies that an individual is no longer waiting to feel better before doing the right

When it comes to the "spiritual practice of medicine," positive change in behavior is far more significant in assessing efficacy than a change in a patient's feeling state.

thing.³ It means that he or she has gotten in the driver's seat and is directing the development of consciousness itself by making choices of increasing integrity. Taking the right action in the face of one's resistance is the very engine that drives the cultivation of virtue that is central to what I have termed to be an "inner" tradition of medicine. Such a chosen position in life implies that a person has awoken to conscience and that a sense of obligation to a greater good is motivating choices. My years of clinical practice have left me doubtless that Chinese medicine can be a powerful tool to support this type of evolutionary transformation. The holistic and integral core value systems, as they ideally inform the practice of our medicine, offer great hope as a tool for helping to heal this fractured world.

However, there are enormous forces resisting the aspirations of this highest medicine. One of the single greatest forces of inertia, shared by practitioners and patients alike, is the cynical notion that human beings are victims of their circumstances. This view denies the absolute nature of choice and thus lets us all off the hook as "doing the best we can." This notion is present subtly, and not so subtly, in the core value system of new age healing that has greatly influenced the practice of Chinese medicine in the West these last forty years. Consider, for example, the term "causative factor," as it is used in some traditions of five-element practice. A subtle implication is that a patient's behaviors can be explained by his or her "elemental" type. A problem with this type of thinking is that, since we all will always have some degree of elementally conditioned influences, our healing can only ever be relative and, therefore, we are never held to be fully responsible for our actions.

Physiology and Choice

In reality, an adult human's actions are always a matter of choice. We must be very careful that we do not justify unwholesome behavior superstitiously using holistic archetypes as an excuse. People are not victims of their constitutions, their stars, their families, demons, spirits, aggressive energy, akabane imbalances, weather, or even their personal histories or cultural conditioning.

We are never victims of our physiology. Physiology is contributed to by our genetic endowment, our previous and current life circumstances, and possibly even karma from past lifetimes. Different cultures have generated complex models for differentiating an individual's physiology according to inherited constitutional and acquired variables. The five-element and eight-principle systems in Chinese medicine are two such examples. Other examples are ayurveda, homeopathy, the enneagram, the American Indian medicine wheel, and any number of astrological systems. We must be clear, however, when applying such models that, while they may accurately describe physiological tendencies of the body, or qualities of psycho-emotional conditioning, they do not infer causality whatsoever when it comes to the behavior of a human being, except to the degree that the individual is ignorant of, or uninterested in, taking responsibility for him or herself.

For example, people who are liver constitutionally can be prone to anger and heat in the blood. Heat in the blood can contribute to the presence of anger and, conversely, anger can contribute to the presence of heat in the blood. A condition of blood heat that persists over time can consume *yin* in the blood vessels, resulting in a loss of elasticity. Such a loss results in a smaller diameter of vessel that places pressure on the heart in a predictable way that *causes* high blood pressure. Of course, high blood pressure can in turn contribute to

rage, feelings of constraint and imprisonment, lack of perspective, and excessive need for control. All the forgoing might be diagnosed constitutionally in the five-element system as wood/fire, and in the eight-principle system as the syndrome pattern of liver fire rising and disturbing the heart.

The physical embodiment of these symptoms results from a direct cause and effect relationship thermodynamically between the presence of heat, the consumption of *yin*, loss of elasticity, rising blood pressure, and the experience of constraint. Once symptoms are embodied, it is unlikely that healing will ever be absolute on the physical plane. While it is true that the embodied manifestations of a syndrome may *cause* hypertension or some other symptom, no functional pathology can “cause” someone to act belligerently, aggressively, proudly, needy, selfishly, or otherwise. Behavior, in those without real brain damage, is *always* a matter of choice. The miracle of consciousness is that it is never damaged by anything that occurs “out here.” Just because a person *feels* constrained, or thinks he has been wronged, doesn’t mean that he has to *act* in reaction to those feelings or thoughts in a way that creates karma, or suffering in self and in others. Humans have a choice.

How often have I heard practitioners say things like, “the patient acts controlling because he or she is a fire constitutional type”? We must understand that this sentiment is only true to the exact degree that the person in question is unconsciously being run by a mechanism. A significant part of helping patients heal in any meaningful spiritual sense lies in the liberation of their capacity to make conscious choices free from a state of bondage to the contents of their own minds. This bondage, though certainly conditioned, is voluntary—at least for us holistic/integral systems thinkers who practice Chinese medicine. Most of us seem to be endlessly, morbidly, and dramatically fascinated with our own thoughts and feelings. Hence, the *Daodejing* reminds us that “the sage is not sick, because he is sick, of being sick.” From a spiritual perspective, often the main problem is that we are not sick enough of our own pathologies to drop them for the sake of the greater good. To do so is a choice determined by the quality of a person’s character and conscience. But for we who represent ourselves as “healers,” dropping the right to take more time to heal our-

selves should be the minimum requirement for licensure.

Relativism, the Absolute, and Escaping the Circle

The *sheng* generating cycle depicts sixty element points in a circle, each of which can be considered to be a metaphor for a unique constitutional type. Each position in the circle has its own uniquely conditioned perspective on life, a unique tint on the window it sees life through. But behind all this seeming diversity, the human mind functions mechanically just the same in all of us. The mechanism of mind orients us in time and space by storing memories and generating a self-image, a created self, a separate self. The mind conditions consciousness by personalizing our life experiences through the creation of meaning. And after we’ve stared through that windshield long enough, we come to believe that we are the junk that has accumulated on it. The five-element system diagnoses the qualitative directionality of this movement away from the absolute center of the circle and out into the relative world.

The *sheng* cycle is a cycle of conditioned weather, thoughts, and feelings. The character *sheng* is one half of the couplet *shengsi* that, in the Buddhist lexicon, denotes *samsara* or the wheel of delusion. This wheel is an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth perpetuated by our attachments to our own thoughts, feelings, and the weather (the external events of our lives that we have no control over). This antiquated model of circular time—winter, spring, summer, late summer, and fall, for eternity—fails to recognize evolutionary development. We are bonded to this cycle through our attachments based on our conditioned relationship to our fear (water) and desire (fire). Using the five elements and eight principles, we practitioners can work forever “out in the circle,” shifting excesses and deficiencies from one place to another around the patient’s body, mind, and spirit in an attempt to “harmonize” him or her with the cycle. This can create a relative sense in the patient of “feeling better” and help decrease the burden of conditioning that contributes to habituated patterns of functioning.

We are used to considering the One from the perspective of the many, but what occurs when we consider the many from the perspective of the One? That means consciously realizing, as self, the perspec-

tive represented by the absolute center (*taiji* or axis) of the circle. For this is the perspective that sees through the illusion of relativity signified by the *sheng* and the *ke* cycles. The point of serious spiritual endeavor has never been to indulge in the circular transformation of the *sheng* cycle but, rather, to be free from the cycle entirely! This liberation from fear and desire is what is meant by “rectification of the heart/kidney axis.” And it doesn’t take time, just interest. But if the absolute healing that is synonymous with freedom is the goal, ultimately, a decision will have to be made based on a choice that only patients can make for themselves. And it is the choice we practitioners make to be free, to evolve, to live in the presence of an absolute call that will help liberate that very same choice in our patients.

The Black-and-White Context

The gate of birth and the door of death are both immaterial, formless passageways. By following mundanity, one dies; by returning to the celestial, one lives—hence the names gate of birth and door of killing. In reality, they are just one opening. —Liu Yiming

The absolute perspective views creation in the black-and-white context of Self and not-self. Hence at this most simple yet profound level of diagnosis, there is merely recognition of what is true and what is not true. There are two momentums that compete for the attention of human consciousness. One of these, the ego, constitutes an imagined self, manifested early in life as a young mind’s attempt to cope with an existential crisis.⁴ The ego’s fundamental orientation toward life is that there is a great problem and that something is terribly wrong. Experience in clinic, and in my own life, has revealed to me that this “self” will never heal. In fact, from a spiritual perspective, it is the functional basis of disease itself.

Let’s face it, this self, as represented by the average patient who values holistic medical care and can pay for it, has had years of psychotherapy and antidepressants, has meditated, done yoga, been to Woodstock, taken retreats at Esalen, been on vision quests, taken ayahuasca in the rain forests with a shaman, done juice fasts, done the forum, studied tantra, in short, had more forms of therapy, physical and otherwise, than any other matter in the known universe. And still its primary focus is on its own

continued on page 9

Awakening Choice continued from page 7

healing while the world it is living in is running down around it! And this pursuit of "healing" occurs against a background of having had better nutrition, more education, and more political, economic, and social freedom than any humans who have ever lived.

Observation reveals that the ego's only commitment is to consuming experience under the pretense of "seeking" as a way to feel better and buy ever more time to "get ready to be ready." And the sad part is, many of us "holistic healers" earn our living in collusion with this self-indulgent monster by helping it feel better with no requirement that it actually change. I can only conclude that is because we value our own comfort above pushing the boundaries of the highest potential of healing that our medicine affords. Because the realization of this highest potential means facing the truth about ourselves. We want to maintain our right to be left alone, so we leave our patients alone. It's that simple. And it occurs to me that the people who can regularly afford "holistic" health care are the privileged few who are in a position to really make the biggest difference on this planet right now, if only they would choose to get over themselves for the sake of something so much greater.

And then there is the authentic Self, that part of us arising spontaneously out of *jing*, *qi*, and *shen*, the eternal creative impulse as it is expressed through, and as, us. This Self, synonymous with spirit, doesn't need healing because nothing ever happened there. This Self never needs any more time to get ready. It's never interested in our personal history, never self-references, and is only ever interested in living the higher possibility of a more wholesome future, right now. It is undaunted by the events of our lives and never sees itself as a victim. Its conscience is awakened to care for the whole because it recognizes itself as the whole. There literally is no "other."

So, if one self will never heal because it is the illness, and the other Self doesn't need healing because it literally is wholeness, then what is our role as healers? Our role is to help shift a patient's identification from the small self of the ego that has been victimized, traumatized, misunderstood and otherwise done wrong by to that One Self that literally is the will to become at ever higher levels of expression *no matter*

what. The vehicle of the body may always have its issues. But, I have seen unequivocally that healing at the level of consciousness itself is absolute and merely a matter of self-identification. It's really a question of just *who*, and *what*, do we think we are? As it turns out, the choice is black and white.

So Who Are We?

The ultimate rectification of the heart/kidney axis as a metaphor for realization of, and behavioral alignment with, the absolute can only occur as a matter of human will (water) and interest (fire). And, at this level of "healing" it is *who we are* as practitioners and not *what we know* that is the most important factor that we can contribute to their healing. A developed practitioner's presence generates "evolutionary tension," the felt sense of a greater integrity and living potential that awakens our conscience and calls us forward. But the price paid for such vertical development is the renunciation of our "right" to take any more time to heal. And this renunciation must be based on the discovery of, identification with, and absolute conviction in, that best part of our selves that doesn't need healing because *nothing ever happened there*. And then, there is the radical notion that we might come to care more about our patient's realization of their own higher potentials than we care about our own problems.

Choices may be consciously, or unconsciously, motivated. But choices, at some level of mind, are always being made whenever we act. A mature person who cares for a whole greater than him or herself becomes occupied with the serious quest to make all choices as conscious and volitional as they possibly can be, always taking responsibility for his or her actions and never blaming conditioning. This is the standard that we practitioners must hold ourselves and our patients to, without ever indulging the thought that our, or their, behaviors are physiologically determined or explained by their element, syndrome pattern, or astrological sign. Humanity now has a choice, and that choice is absolute. If we are to survive, a critical mass of interested human beings must awaken to the absolute nature of the choices that confront us right now. My experience is that living in the constant presence of such an absolute call is intense, and beautiful, and requires more from me than I ever could have imagined. Often I don't want to do it, but out of

a deep sense of care, the choice to move forward becomes increasingly choice-less. I must.

I can't think of a higher purpose for the practice of medicine at this moment in history than the conscious liberation of the choosing faculty in both practitioner and patients. It is the part of our selves that is interested in this absolute simplicity and responsibility that must be the focus of our attention. For that which is seeking is, literally, the goal of discovery itself.

References

Jarrett, LS: *Nourishing Destiny, The Inner Tradition of Chinese Medicine*, Spirit Path Press, Stockbridge, 1998

Jarrett, LS: *The Clinical Practice of Chinese Medicine*, Spirit Path Press, Stockbridge, 2003

Lonny Jarrett has practiced Chinese Medicine in Stockbridge, Massachusetts since 1986, and is a founding board member of the Acupuncture Society of Massachusetts and a Fellow of the National Academy of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. Lonny is author of Nourishing Destiny and The Clinical Practice of Chinese Medicine. His next two-year Clinical Integration course begins in September 2007. Course details are available at spiritpathpress.com or by emailing revolution@nycap.rr.com.

1. These value systems are called "vMemes" and are discussed in chapter 37 of my Clinical Practice text in the context of different evolutionary stages that can be identified in the practice of Chinese medicine.
2. Spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen emphasizes liberation of the choosing faculty in consciousness. See his discussions with Ken Wilber in *What Is Enlightenment? Magazine* (WIE.org).
3. Note that I am not blaming patients for their conditions in the new age sense of suggesting that each of us "chooses" our illness. The cause of illness exists on a continuum from largely genetic influences such as kidney deficient asthma in a two year old, to being a direct result of a choice as in emphysema from smoking. What I'm pointing to is the assumption of 100% potential choice in relationship to our actions as opposed to the narcissistic notion that we are wholly responsible for our life circumstances.
4. See *Nourishing Destiny*, Ch 9. on the nature of constitutional type.