

ACUPUNCTURE CORE THERAPY

Shakujyū Chiryō

DR. SHŌJI KOBAYASHI

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*I dedicate this book to my wife
Kazuyo and my four children
Ayumi, Keiji, Fumiyo, and Noboru, who
spared no effort in their cooperation to achieve
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FOREWORD

The concept and the methodology of Acupuncture Core Therapy combine three fundamental elements of the body's vital energy system: the *hara*, which is the abdominal center of physiological vital force; the spinal energy system, which is the original source of our being and our link with other realms of consciousness; and *qì gōng*, which is development of the body's ability to intentionally store, concentrate, and distribute vital force. Therein lies its significance and its great utility as a healing modality.

Dr. Shōji Kobayashi has distilled the core of traditional teachings on the body's vital energy system and has developed a method of acupuncture treatment that should redefine root treatment (*honchihō*). This work is not a direct translation, but an adaptation of translations from the book by Dr. Kobayashi entitled *Shakujyū Chiryō*, some of his articles, and notes from lectures and discussions.

Dr. Kobayashi reintegrates the fragments of transmitted teachings and distills them to their fundamental intrinsic significance. His effort is an endeavor of crucial importance for understanding how to use acupuncture to influence subtle energy. Dr. Kobayashi is quick to note that many practitioners are very successful at evaluation and treatment of patients using a wide array of interpretations of yīn-yáng and the five phases and applying them to various treatment methodologies. With respect to systems of practice there are clearly many ways to do it right. Those practitioners who do not choose to adopt Dr. Kobayashi's approach to treatment can still benefit in many ways by reading his work. They will maximize the benefits to their patients even as they continue to use their present methods of acupuncture and moxibustion.

The flexibility of the concepts of yīn-yáng and the five phases allows great latitude in how practitioners and scholars interpret the classical literature and apply it to living situations. Historically there have been numerous permutations of yīn-yáng theory, the five phases, and the eight principles in the practice of acupuncture, moxibustion, and botanical medicine. The diverse applications of these classical laws may be conceptualized as problem-solving "software," developed by practitioners to apply these universal principles to solve the unique sets of problems in the ever-changing conditions

they encounter in practice. One might say that Dr. Kobayashi describes the “operating system” in which the “software” functions, and which is fundamental and binding for all. His focus never wavers from the roots of the energy system, the finitude of inherited human physiological energy, and the interaction and interpenetration of the vital fields between the practitioner and recipient. The fundamental nature of his concepts is the reason why his teaching and protocols increasingly have been adopted into the curricula of acupuncture training schools in Japan.

HARA

Acupuncture Core Therapy is called *Shakujyū Chiryō*, or *shakujyū* therapy in Japan. The term *shaku* refers to palpable deep stagnation and stasis of the *qì* and blood, and the term *gyū* refers to superficial stagnation and stasis of the *qì* and blood, as found in the lower abdomen and trunk. One goal of Acupuncture Core Therapy is to remove all blood and *qì* stasis and stagnation rather than to chase after the symptoms that appear as the outward manifestations. Its emphasis on abdominal palpation is rooted in the importance of the hara as a core manifestation of the vital reserve and, in Japanese tradition, much more.

The hara (*tanden* in Japanese or *dān tián* (cinnabar field) in Chinese), is the area below the navel. The acupuncture points CV-4 (*guān yuán*), CV-5 (*shí mén*), and CV-7 (*yīn jiāo*) on the conception vessel channel are all named *tanden* in various point nomenclature systems. The hara or *dān tián* is considered to be the body’s center of gravity and the storage area for the reserve of vital force. In Daoist tradition, the hara is the lower *dān tián*; the heart area is the middle *dān tián*, and the brain is the upper *dān tián*.

In Japanese tradition, hara also means that state of being wherein one is connected to one’s primal center. In the tradition of hara, the human is not autonomous but is rooted in natural forces. An unnatural shift in the body’s center of gravity indicates no less than a misalignment with the fundamental order of life that sustains us all.

The meaning of hara in the Japanese cultural context is also expressed in the language. The expression, “*hara no aru hito*” refers to an individual who has a “center.” There is also the negative expression, “*hara no nai hito*,” meaning an individual who has no center. The centered person is one who is balanced and capable of expressing warmth and robust magnanimity. The unbalanced person is one who is small-minded and petty. The centered individual faces life calmly, is alert, but maintains an inner composure. The expression, “*hara de kangaeru*” literally, “to think with hara,” means to respond to a situation appropriately, instinctively, and intuitively. A peaceful or

calm person would have “*hara ga suwatte iru*,” a hara at rest (“sitting”). The opposite would be “*hara ga tatsu*,” a hara that is “rising up” or “flaring up” as in anger. The most well-known expression in English using the term hara is “*hara kiri*,” which refers to the ancient custom of suicide by incision in the lower abdomen (also known as *seppuku* when referring to the act of a samurai warrior).

The meaning of hara also flows into the arts. The term *haragei*, literally “hara art,” means an activity made perfect through hara. The use of hara has been cultivated since ancient times in *budō*, the way of the warrior, *geidō*, the way of the artist, and *sadō*, the way of meditation.

In Japanese traditional arts, the sense and purpose of practice is inner transformation. Ultimately, this existential transformation is liberation from domination by the “I” which fears unpleasantness, struggle, failure, and death. The traditional artist strives for this inner achievement. Though the artistic outcome may be inspiring and beneficial, its ultimate benefit is thought to be for the inner life of the practitioner. Whether it is a martial art, a graphic art such as calligraphy or *sumi-e*, tea ceremony, Noh dance, archery, pottery-making, or flower arrangement, the goal of training in a traditional Japanese art is always to learn to use hara.

By creating an inner stillness and resting in hara, the universal force can move through the body without obstruction and manifest a beneficial result. To be in hara means to be anchored in an immovable center through which all motion, all dynamic activity flows. When the hara is fully developed, achievements become possible that are beyond highly skilled technique and concentration. The sumo wrestler practices an ancient art that directly requires daily attention to building the strength of the hara. Although their body weight may exceed 400 lbs, sumo wrestlers are possessed of remarkable agility, speed, and flexibility. A true master can use the power of hara to push his opponent out of the ring with only slight physical contact.

At a certain point during my clinical apprenticeship in acupuncture studies in Japan, I was required to learn tea ceremony, martial arts, calligraphy, and Noh dance. The use of hara in each of these activities soon became apparent, for each became a mantra of movement that focused awareness emanating from hara. The master of any traditional art can observe the student’s progress simply by observing the student’s comportment—the degree to which the student is centered in hara. Even the posture common to all the traditional arts centers on the hara, for in *seiza* (literally, “correct sitting”), one is seated on the ankles with knees forward, spine straight, and shoulders and arms in a relaxed position.

Many Western observers have been impressed with the almost preternatural stillness and yet inward alertness of a teahouse geisha sitting in

seiza, or a martial artist springing into full action from a completely motionless and tension-free position. The practice of hara itself—sitting *seiza* in hara in a full state of self-possession—is taught in its purity as an inner practice, as a means of resting in a sphere of strength away from the “I,” a state where so much energy is expended composing and defending it.

The ultimate model of liberation of the hara can be seen in images of Buddha with an enormous hara belly, deep in meditative bliss, embodying the state of being that is completely joined with the Absolute. Short of Buddhahood, each person nevertheless has *reiki*, divine wisdom, and *reinō*, divine power within. To be anchored in the hara, even with just a short period of practice, enables a person to experience a fresh approach to life that is both liberating and sustaining.

The Japanese traditional approach to healing considers that a sick person has blockages (*kori*, or “hardness”), which are both a cause of discomfort and an impediment to healing. Strengthening the force in the hara can relieve blockages and tension. Likewise, when the force in the hara is insubstantial, the feet become cold and the head hot, a reverse of the more harmonic energetic condition of warm below and cool above.

In Acupuncture Core Therapy, the diagnostic exercise of palpating the abdomen for *shaku* and *gyū* reflects the significance of hara in determining the patient’s condition. Palpating the strength of the hara is a reliable way to determine the patient’s prognosis. A flexible, resilient hara that resists pressure indicates that there are abundant physiological resources available for healing. A flaccid lower abdomen with no tone is a sign of internal exhaustion. The abdomen or *tanden* is the central diagnostic region where the primary impediments to the free circulation of *jīng qì* by *shaku* (deep stagnation and stasis) or *gyū* (superficial stagnation and stasis) can be perceived.

The most significant historical antecedent to Acupuncture Core Therapy comes from the teachings of the group called the *Mubunryū*, who practiced the system of the Zen monk Oda Mubunsai. Oda Sensei removed the abdominal obstructions of *qì*—*shaku* and *gyū*—by holding a short, blunt, wooden stick or an acupuncture needle on the hara and using a hammer to tap the head of the stick or the hand holding the needle. Practitioners of *Mubunryū* used this tapping technique (*dashinjutsu*) for direct treatment of the *zàng* and *fū*. This method is described in their unique text, *Shindō Hikesshū* (*Compilation of Secrets of the Way of Acupuncture*), first published in 1772.¹

¹Fujimoto Rempu, *Benshaku Shindō Hikesshū* (*Explication of the Compilation of Secrets of the Way of Acupuncture*), Shizensha, Tokyo, 1978.

The *Mubunryū* focused exclusively on the abdomen for both evaluation and treatment. The abdomen as the locus of the *zàng* and *fǔ* was considered the fundamental region for resolving root pathologies. In effect, to eliminate evil (*ja*, or *xié* in Chinese) in the abdomen would revitalize the organs and enhance the circulation of blood and *qì* in the channels and network vessels. In contemporary Japan a significant group of professional massage therapists specialize in *ampuku* (abdominal massage), a therapy based on this concept.

Similar to Dr. Kobayashi in contemporary times, this *Mubunryū* school also used a method of focused awareness. It was considered of primary importance that the practitioner entertain good wishes for the patient's welfare and be "filled with heart," "*chiryōka no shinji no daiji*." The heart is of course the "core" etymologically as well as metaphorically (*coeur* in French, *cor* in Latin). The Chinese character for heart, *shén* 心, reflects not only the meaning of heart as the organ, but also the mind.

JĪNG QÌ - ESSENCE

The force known as *jīng qì*, or essence, is a primary force in the growth, development, and maintenance of metabolic and other vital activity. Congenital (prenatal) essence is inherited from the parents and is stored in the kidney (*shèn*). This Chinese medical kidney includes the spine, skeletal system, mineral metabolism, and the urogenital system as well as the kidney organs themselves. Acquired (postnatal) essence (*hòu tiān jīng* 後天精) is also stored in the kidney. By virtue of its capacity to store essence, the kidney is the organ system at the root of the vital foundation of life. Its *yáng* aspect is *yáng qì* and its *yīn* aspect is reproductive essence. This *yáng qì* defies gravity and maintains the erect posture of the human. It is the animating and energizing force of all living structures. The governing vessel is the repository of this force.

The term *jīng qì* is translated as "essence" or "semen." It is a primal force that drives growth and development and maintains metabolic activity, a fundamental and substantial manifestation of vital energy. As an energetic force it is associated with will power, zest for life, creativity, and enthusiasm. As a physical force it is related to the hormone supply, particularly androgens (such as testosterone), which drive libido as well as tissue growth and repair. Production of sperm and ova are functions of *jīng qì*.

Because sexual activity consumes *jīng*, priests, monks, nuns, and others seriously committed to the path of spiritual evolution traditionally use celibacy as a method to preserve *jīng*. There are as well Asian sexual techniques that are used to preserve this vital essence so that it is not dissipated in sexual relations. According to some Asian traditions, highly evolved spiritual

masters create condensations of *jīng* in their bodies, called *sharira* in Sanskrit. These *sharira* appear in the ashes after cremation as a type of crystal. They are reputed to have miraculous powers in the same way that the bones of saints are considered holy relics for blessings in the West. (Bones are associated with the “water” phase of the five phases and are said to retain some of the properties of *jīng*).

An individual’s supply of this vital substance/energy is finite. The quantity of *jīng qì* is a determinant of longevity. Consequently, one may adopt lifestyle habits or practices that preserve essence, or one can lead a life of dissipation. Though seldom mentioned in the therapeutic context of acupuncture theory, *jīng qì* is necessary to manifest the effects of treatment. The focus of Acupuncture Core Therapy on this basic primal force connects clinical practice to the ground of our physical existence.

THE SPINAL FORCE

Much of what we know of the spinal force comes from the Vedic tradition originating in ancient India. In this teaching, the vital force (*prana*) is distributed along a central cerebrospinal pathway (*sushumna*) through vital centers known as chakras. The dormant “serpent power,” *kundalini*, lies coiled at the base of the spine as the creative potential and qualities of soul. Also at the base chakra are two other major channels of vital force that flow along either side of the spine, the *ida* (lunar, feminine or passive) and *pingala* (solar, masculine or active). Vital force also flows through channels known as *nadi* distributed throughout the body.

The spine itself is said to correlate to the ancient Tree of Life of the biblical Garden of Eden myth from the Book of Genesis. There is an order of swamis in India who carry a staff (*danda*) on their journeys called the staff of Brahma, representing the spinal column. The caduceus, a Greek symbol of medical practice, resembles the Vedic model of two serpents intertwining along a column at the top of which are wings of liberation.

In the Chinese model, the channel of *qì* flowing upward along the spine from the coccyx along the central axis of the skull to the philtrum is known as the governing vessel. The governing vessel is the channel that is the repository of the body’s *yáng* force. It also plays an important role in Daoist meditation. Also on the back are the two branches of the bladder channel, originating at the medial canthus, ascending either side of the midline of the skull, and descending on both sides of the spine.

In the early life of the embryo, the kidney is a conspicuous physiological structure. The pronephros, mesonephros, and eventually the metanephros grow out of the nephrogenic cord, which develops in close proximity

to where the spine eventually develops. At a very early stage of development the kidney has direct correspondences in each spinal segment, which we see as a residual phenomenon in the dorsal bladder channels. Yoshio Manaka and Tōhaku Ishii, Japanese researchers into the embryological origin of the channel system, have suggested that the initial polar axis, when the fertile egg first divides, corresponds developmentally to the governing vessel and conception vessel. These two channels thus represent the primal polarity of all subsequent growth and differentiation. According to their research and study, the spinal energy flow exists at the very origin of the new organism.

QÌ GŌNG

Qì gōng is a respiration of vital force throughout the body and its energy field. It also teaches techniques to accumulate qì in the *tanden* (hara). The purposes of accumulating and concentrating an abundance of vital force are many, but one source of motivation is the conviction that you can form a durable energetic body to be born into the next world. Qì gōng practitioners who are able to accumulate a surplus of vital force are able to use it for healing and even for the development of paranormal abilities.

If human vital fields represent an important component of our conscious existence, we can posit that interaction with these vital fields is a factor of any encounter involving two or more people. The therapeutic encounter is no exception. It is sanctified by the patient's desire for wholeness and the practitioner's commitment to be an instrument of that process. Dr. Kobayashi asserts that since any therapeutic encounter entails the commingling of the two vital fields, whether intentional or otherwise, it improves efficiency to optimize this subtle interaction between practitioner and patient to therapeutic advantage. Awareness of this phenomenon should be a motivating factor for anyone who wishes to create the spiritual fortitude to maximize therapeutic proficiency and technical skill.

THE JAPANESE PARADIGM OF ACUPUNCTURE

The Japanese are famously tolerant of divergent philosophical points of view. Numerous schools of thought exist among acupuncturists, especially those who claim a classical tradition. Chinese acupuncture according to TCM principles enjoys a certain popularity in Japan. However, the two primary schools of acupuncture techniques are *shigeki ryōhō*, or “stimulation therapy” utilizing Chinese needles, electrical needle stimulation or both, and *keiraku chiryō*, or “meridian therapy” (channel therapy), using very mild stimulation with very fine needles, often not inserted.

Keiraku chiryō could be said to be quintessentially Japanese because of its relatively recent history. Yet it has ancient roots in the Chinese classical literature, a distinction not shared by the modern, standardized TCM notion of point specificity. Dr. Yoshio Manaka explained the profound effect of different needle doses. The viewpoint of *keiraku chiryō* practitioners can be summarized thus: If you strongly stimulate a point and obtain the “*dé qì*” sensation, you can anticipate accentuation of a local effect. If you seek a systemic effect, a lower dose activates an influence on remote body regions through the channels and network vessels. Since the low dose is typical of channel therapy, subtle point location is an essential element.

In channel therapy there is an emphasis on palpation, on very light stimulation, on understanding the *hara* and its role in the subtle energy framework of the vital field. There is also a recognition of the role of root treatment (*honchihō*) and branch treatment (*hyōchihō*), a concept that was revitalized in the Edo Period by a man of genius named Waichi Sugiyama. Many rightly consider Sugiyama to be the father of modern Japanese acupuncture. Sugiyama founded 54 *juku* (acupuncture training centers) for the blind in the Edo (Tokyo) area. He wrote a definitive textbook of acupuncture that has been a primary textbook for almost 200 years. He invented the *shinkan*, or “needle guide tube,” a breakthrough that facilitated treatment by blind acupuncturists. He was also the personal acupuncturist for the Shogun.

The traditional importance of palpation in Japan even overflows into botanical medicine. *Kampō*, the extant Japanese system of herbal formulary based on the Chinese classical literature of traditional medicinal formulas, emphasizes abdominal patterns in selecting a prescription. In *Kampō*, choosing a prescription involves not only examination of the pulse but also recognition of the distribution of abdominal tension to identify patterns associated with traditional medicinal formulas.

Tōdō Yoshimasu (1702-1773), founder of the “Ancient Method School” (*Kōhōha*) of *Kampō* in the mid-18th century, reestablished the principle of the abdominal origin of all disease, expressed as “*fukudoku ichigenron*,” meaning “discourse on abdominal poison (or toxicity) as the single source of disease.” The Japanese classic *Fukushō Kiran*,² written by Shukko Wakuda and Bunrei Inaba, is devoted to this concept of *hara* diagnosis as the foundation for prescribing classical herb formulas.

There is also a traditional emphasis in Japan on the skillful and sensitive use of hands not only diagnostically but therapeutically. The development of acupuncture treatment systems by blind acupuncturists like Kōdō Fukushima has raised the standard of palpation skill to an almost paranormal

²Shukko Wakuda and Bunrei Inaba, *Fukushō Kiran*, Idō no Nipponsha, Tokyo, 1976.

level. These techniques are a revival of earlier root treatment systems, such as those in use during the Edo period by Waichi Sugiyama and other masters. Non-insertion needle techniques are increasingly used, especially in groups such as Tōyōhari (founded by Kōdō Fukushima), Tōhō, Shinkyū Keiraku Kenkyū Kōshin, and others.

The use of the hands in needle technique is important. Both hands direct the needle to its proper location. The *oshide* hand, which holds the point and prepares the point for the introduction of the needle, and the *sashide* hand, which is the hand that wields the needle, are both used in concert to subtly tune the impact of the stimulus, to sense and direct movement of qì.

Dr. Kobayashi has developed a method distilled from these traditions that obtains a powerful result in a short time and even gets results in cases that would not normally respond to acupuncture. He uses the concept of *jīng qì* as a unifying principle. By removing any stagnation that constrains the vital heat of the *jīng qì* and that precipitates fundamental cold (冷 *hie* in Japanese, pronounced HEE-yeh), the treatment frees a profound generative healing force. Dr. Kobayashi has also begun to explore new facets of five-phase theory in applying treatment to the *shū* points.

The needling technique in Acupuncture Core Therapy is accomplished without a guide tube and is applied in a “reciprocal” relationship with the skin. The needle is “allowed in” by the skin rather than forced in by the practitioner tapping on it in a guide tube. The special silver needle used has a tapered point that is not so sharp as to force entry at slight pressure, like a conventional stainless steel needle. This makes the technique autogenic, in that the permeability of the skin at the treated point determines if the needle even penetrates the skin, and if so, to what depth.

Acupuncture Core Therapy treats the energy of the spinal system, the primordial inherited prenatal qì, which embryologically is an earlier and more fundamental level of development than the “command points” that appear much later in fetal development, and which are the five-phase points typically used for root treatment at the arms and legs. Treatment utilizing the energy of the spinal system allows the recipient to feel in touch with a deep reserve of latent vitality. The practitioner using *hara* and *qì gōng* techniques also connects with their own core vitality. The communion is profound and the results obtained are rapid and exponential in power and efficacy.

The use of consciousness, or intention, is at the “core” of Acupuncture Core Therapy. The connection between practitioner and patient is implicit in the therapeutic interaction initiated by a patient’s desire to heal. Acupuncture Core Therapy seeks to optimize this connection, which exists at a deep level, whether recognized or not. This primal relationship between the practitioner and patient is at the foundation of any therapeutic encounter,

regardless of the method applied. Compared to the benefit of “heart-full” awareness focused with benevolent intention, improved needling technique, sophisticated theories, and knowledge of energy flows merely scratch the surface.

It is impossible to train in Japan or in the Japanese way without being profoundly moved and without altering any prior set of values and expectations. The awareness of *hara* epitomizes this spirit of full participation in your personal practices, whether they are spiritual or mundane. My original intention, as a foreigner who studied in Japan for six years, was to learn a skill to bring back home—to acquire “know-how.” I remember my profound shock the day it finally hit me that acupuncture treatment is not something you do, it is something you *become*. I believe that Acupuncture Core Therapy truly epitomizes this principle.

Dan Kenner, PhD, LAc.