

Catalysing Emergence: *Zheng Qi* and the Authentic Self

Lonny S. Jarrett

'I will be fond of keeping still, and the people will of themselves become correct (zheng)'. Dao De Jing, 57

Question:

Other than treating St 36 *zu san li*, how do I tonify *zheng qi*?

Answer:

'Zheng' means 'upright.' The character *zheng* (正) signifies 'going from one shore to another without stopping half way'. These two shores are denoted by the number two (*er*: 二) signifying heaven and earth.¹ Earth is *yin* and signifies 'conditioning' of the body and mind. It represents our actual state and stage of development, our degree of division, and 'where we are right now'. Heaven is *yang*, spirit, *shen*, and signifies both our inspiration and destination. 'Not stopping half way' implicates will (*zhi*), aspiration, and the degree to which we sincerely recognise and are aligned with a pure motive. *Zheng* means variously, 'proper, straight, just, positive, rectify, correct, main, and primary'.

The conduit for *zheng qi* is the heart kidney axis. This is the axis, the straight line between heaven (heart) and earth (kidney), the absolute, that which has no distortion and is unconditioned. It represents the core self, the dimension that does not move in the face of adversity. It is a container for, and conduit to, the primordial (*yuan*: 元) source (*yuan*: 源) of self, that part of us that has never been wounded, traumatised, or victimised.

The straight line is 'One', *yi* (一), heaven, and *yang*, the root character that the entire Chinese language is based on. One, *yi* (一), is spirit and *zheng qi* is the upright force of that spirit working its way up the spine toward the heart and mind, as the universal motive for being and becoming asserts itself into consciousness on its eternal (*chang*: 常) journey of self inquiry and awareness.

Zheng qi is cultivated by the exertion of will to remain still and not move from one's heart, one's intention, in the face of fear that arises in the presence of the unknown. When we apply will to sit straight and not move during meditation, we are applying *zheng qi* in order to travel from one shore to the next, from identification with the conditioned mind (earth) to discovery of that universal self beyond the mind (heaven). Right intention

in practice is that regardless of what thoughts, feelings, and emotions arise in consciousness, or sensations in the body, we take the position of 'no relationship'; we will not be moved and we will not stop 'half way'. A powerful contemplation that immediately marshals *zheng qi* is to consider, 'what would it mean to go all the way right now?' Of course this will also bring into awareness every part of us that isn't interested! Contemplated sincerely and deeply, clarity may thus be engendered regarding the dual poles within us, a foundational view for cognising the apparent complexity of life.

Simultaneously to exerting *zheng qi* in this way through the exertion of will and proper intention, we are also cultivating *zheng qi* by seeing our intention through to the very end. We use *zheng qi* to hold the vessel upright yet through the alchemy of heart/kidney, *shen/jing*, fire/water, we are also cultivating *zheng qi* manifesting through us as the virtues of soul depth and spiritual self confidence. We have consciously created a container for spirit/*shen* allowing it to manifest in two directions simultaneously; transcendence and immanence. This means both transcending the status quo, the self-image, by returning to the root (quiescence/emptiness) while also liberating the passion to create a better future in pursuit of being a vehicle for the emergence of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Upright *qi* is that which supports the cultivation of virtue in each official. The cultivation of virtue is accomplished only by acting virtuously right now. Virtue isn't something to be worked on and accomplished to manifest at some future point. Only virtue cultivates virtue.² Hence, it is said that, 'the path and the goal are one'. *Zheng qi* straightens that which is bent. In this way form comes to reflect the pure motive of spirit that sustains it as a vehicle for its own expression. In this sense, *zheng qi* is related to *zhen qi* or 'true *qi*'. *Zhen* 真 means 'true, authentic'. It is the basis of the authentic self that lies beneath *yin*, mundane, conditioning of both genetic and cultural origin.

Zhen signifies 'spiritual conversion' as the upright (*zheng*) force of the true self, of spirit, pushes its way into consciousness burning through self-image, ego, and conditioning to rectify that which has been bent by conditioned relationship to experience resulting in suffering to self and other, born of will or ignorance. *Zhen qi*

is the foundation of the 'authentic self' or the 'true man' (let's change that to 'human'!). *Zheng* is etymologically related to 'de' 德 meaning to 'rectify the heart', 'to make the heart straight', 'to be moral'.

In turn, *de* (德) is part of *de* (德) as in *Dao De Jing*. *De* (德) signifies that, 'as one moves through the world, s/he can be looked at from all directions and no deviation can be found in his/her heart.' The character has overtones of signifying 'intuition'; the capacity to know the world directly with the heart (pre-thought) bypassing the analytical facilities of the mind. It signifies 'original nature' in the infant and 'virtue' in the adult who has rectified the heart, and 'gone all the way without stopping' through the exertion of will, of upright *qi*, and travelled with intention to the distant shore.³

Any treatment administered that rectifies a distortion, provides a conduit for true self, and engenders proper functioning, has made available and strengthened the presence of *zhen* and *zheng qi*. Sitting up straighter, brightness in the eyes, clarity of thought, intention, and word are all evidence of *zheng qi* and the rectification of what has been bent. The foundation of *zheng*

qi is self-discovery and rectification of the will as a conduit for pure motive. While this can be supported from many angles with needles, herbs, etc. (my books and teaching are mostly about this), the foundation of clinical efficacy in the integral practice of medicine is having done this oneself.

Only to the degree the practitioner is a living example of a higher integrity, will he or she be able to inspire such and work with the forces named in this article within the patient. It is our appreciation of the forces of both inspiration and resistance within, and the self-knowledge gained by not 'stopping half way' ourselves, through which we will come to know the patient because there is only one self. All medicine is, at its heart, in service to that.

Acknowledgements: The author wishes to thank Heiner Fruehauf for his inspiring insights.

Editor's note: Although it is EJOM's normal editorial policy to capitalise English translations of Chinese terms for the organs etc (see p55) the author has specifically requested that we keep his use of lower case in this article.

ENDNOTES

1. The word *zheng* 正 is a variation of the word *zhi* 止, which originally (oracle bone pictogram) represents the image of a single foot imprint in the ground: 'putting one foot in front of the other/taking a step forward', often associated with military expeditions - therefore the association of this character with the gall bladder in chapter 8 of the *Neijing* (where the GB is called the officer of *zhong zheng* 中正). Adding a single line to this character to produce *zheng* 正 either means 'crusading for the one truth' (as some ancient commentators believe) or, more along your line of interpretation, 'walking toward Heaven (while staying grounded/connected to Earth)'. Personal communication from Heiner Fruehauf.

2. There is a quaint notion regarding 'transforming emotions into virtues'. One does not forge humility out of anger in the way that one makes airplanes out of steel. The emergence of virtue has nothing to do with changing one's experience or making emotions into anything other than what they are. Rather, the emergence of virtue is entirely contingent on right relationship to experience.

3. The character *de* 德 is composed of the word 行, to walk, and the character 聽 to listen/follow: describing 'virtue' *de* as bringing meditative insights ('listening to the voice of the universe') into the actions of everyday life: 'listening deep within, and then walking/doing/following it.' Both characters emphasise the Confucian concept of everyday life action ('walking one's talk'; also the original meaning of the concept of the Five Phase Elements 五行, which are really the Five Proper Ways of Action). Personal communication from Heiner Fruehauf. To read more about the relationship between *de*, the virtue of listening, and the function of SI 19 *ting gong* see Jarrett, LS: *The Clinical Practice of Chinese Medicine*, 1994, pp. 369-371.