This interview grew out of conversations from August – December 2015 between Heiner Fruehauf, PhD, LAc, and Regina Weichert, founder of Lyme Nation. With thanks to Dr. Fruehauf for so generously sharing his time and thoughts.

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REGINA: I understand your approach has been called “Slow Medicine,” can you say more about that?

HEINER: I don’t know whether that’s the only thing I would call my approach, but I definitely like the concept. It obviously comes from the term “slow food” vs. fast food. We live in a day and age when people are expecting immediate results. For instance, I just had a group of college kids at my home over the weekend. While they were all very nice and respectful, a lot of them turned out to be addicted to drugs that had been prescribed by their college doctors for a variety of anxiety and depression disorders. At first, these types of medications may have helped them to focus better in class, but eventually they discovered that the drugs were creating serious problems for them in the long term. This situation is sort of a metaphor for our present way of life. There is a relentless focus on short-term satisfaction, which will invariably create long-term issues down the road, whether it’s in the realm of credit card use, financial planning, healthcare, home construction, agriculture, or our relationship with the environment in general – all of it is focused on the “right now.” In German there’s a saying, “Nach mir die Sintflut” (may the floods come after me), or in other words, “I’m going to go ahead in this way now, no matter what impact my actions have on the planet and future generations.”

But to answer your question more directly, Chinese medicine is based on Daoist principles, and Daoism used to be a way of nature-based thinking rather than a religion. To the ancient Chinese, the Dao represented the laws of nature, “The Way,” that makes the world go round. Resonating with this age-old philosophy, all forms of holistic medicine are based on the fundamental belief that nature creates and nature heals, and that the forces inherent in natural processes are the only thing that does the actual healing.

Nature, however, has its own laws and its own time. All patients want to be better tomorrow, and yes, I too want their suffering to stop right away. But if we truly want our own bodies to take charge of the healing, we must first recognize and acknowledge that the body has its own intelligence and ways of achieving a cure; any serious interference will only create deeper problems. If you plant a small seedling, you can’t expect that it will grow into a massive oak tree overnight – it takes a predetermined amount of time for that to happen.

By the same reasoning, if a patient comes in with osteoporosis, or cancer, or complex autoimmune disease caused by a combination of factors such as environmental toxicity, emotional trauma and nutritional deficiencies, making therapeutic inroads will take time. In contrast to modern medicine, many of my colleagues and I do believe that it is possible to restore emunctory detox function and reverse cellular degeneration all the way down to the bone layer. Most holistic medical traditions are therefore quite optimistic about the body’s ability to bounce back. Rather than thinking, “Oh, your liver is cirrhotic, it will only get harder and more enlarged as you age,” or, “you are osteoporotic, it will only be
downhill from here,” or, “you are schizophrenic, you will only get crazier and more dysfunctional with time,” we believe that in theory anything can be healed. It is part of this nature based thinking that every winter is followed by summer, every planetary mass is balanced by a counterweight in this universe, and every disease, no matter how serious, has its cure. However, this process will take time, the body’s and nature’s own time.

When a patient comes to me, I always take the following stance: “Your own body does the healing, so I personally can’t guarantee you anything, but I will commit to being in the trenches with you along the way, and support you throughout all the ups and downs that you will experience.” At some point five years into the journey, a cancer patient may typically say, “My oncologist just declared me cancer free – just when I was beginning to forget what it feels like to be regarded as a healthy person.” Yes, there are of course stories of people fasting and detoxing for a mere week, purging a bunch of worms in the process, and being relieved of all their chronic health issues in a short period of time. But in my experience, healing is most often not that swift and mono-causal and heroically glorious of a process. In most cases, healing tends to be a very unceremonious and anticlimactic type of affair, and it requires an understanding of the “slow” laws of nature.

When it comes to the treatment of Lyme disease this principle is especially important for both patient and practitioner. Lyme involves many organ systems and tends to be deep and systemic. An inflammation-prone acidic body milieu, for instance, needs to be changed to a more alkaline environment; year-long or even decade long trauma that habitually causes the body to be hyper-alert and overreact all the time – manifesting in the form of anxiety, insomnia, tinnitus, and autoimmune reactions – needs to be soothed and thoroughly reconditioned. This all takes time, and one can’t just stop treatment at the first sign of trouble. Our world is becoming increasingly complex, and there are more and more elements in the environment that can potentially affect us. For instance, we can’t just wake up in the morning and say, “Oh, I don’t feel so good, I should stop taking my remedy because it probably caused an uncomfortable (Herxheimer) reaction.” When in fact, this may have been caused by environmental fluctuations, such as electromagnetic changes associated with a solar flare. When we are sick, it means that our ability to adapt to both natural and unnatural stress factors in our environment is compromised. We then become the proverbial canaries in the coalmine, and to change that status simply takes time.

To use another example, I can’t just set off into the open ocean and head toward France, I need to have a plan and know the proper direction at all times. If I don’t see land after two days, I can’t just turn around or drastically change course – otherwise I might end up circling the open water for years. This is why a practitioner working with Lyme needs to have certainty of direction and experience at the outset of the journey, so s/he can say to the patient: “Please trust me, we will keep going in this direction; I know it may be scary and feel
uncertain for a while longer, but we will eventually get there. Along the way, we won’t be able to control the wind, and therefore the journey may take one month, but it could possibly take as long as three months. But it won’t work to just say, ‘I so don’t like this, I need to try something else.’” Especially considering the fact that most patients who come to my clinic have already tried so many different modalities before. What we should do, therefore, is to contain people in their suffering as best as we can, and educate them about the laws of nature as they unfold in their bodies. And, most importantly, repeat the message that healing takes time.

REGINA: There seems to be such massive confusion about Lyme and related infections, all the different symptoms Lyme causes in the body. From your perspective, is there some kind of unifying concept that explains these symptoms that Lyme causes? What is Lyme doing to us that this happens?

HEINER: Once again, I would like to answer this question from the perspective of a system-based view of the world. Holism, in essence, is the way in which ancient people viewed nature and all of the myriad phenomena within it. Another time honored term is “alchemy,” meaning that everybody and everything and every situation represents a synthesis of different elements: everything is complex and the result of fusion. The ancient Chinese described this multi-tiered structure of reality through the interactive trinity of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. Our bodies and what goes on inside them cannot be considered to exist in a vacuum. There are biochemical processes on the cellular level; there are our thoughts and emotions; there are obvious environmental influences such as those from our immediate surroundings, as well as more subtle ones like cosmic radiation and constant bio electromagnetic fluctuations in the atmosphere; there is the effect of social and community interactions. All of these influences fuse together and determine how we are and how whole and healthy we feel at a given moment.

This way of looking at the world and our health is fundamentally different from how we have come to perceive reality, and our bodies and disease within it, through the conditioning of modern science. Science deems itself “scientific” precisely because it deliberately filters out the complexity of nature and the real world. All experiments are conducted in a controlled space and thus appear to reinforce the mechanistic belief that every phenomenon can be reduced to a singular factor. In the case of Lyme, for instance, all suffering is pinned on the presence of borrelia spirochetes and/or related parasites such as babesia or bartonella. This worldview leads to the blaming of the outside world – if there is infection, it’s because of this bacteria or virus or mold, etc. This attitude extends to everything else in our lives. If we feel awful emotionally, it must be because of our abusive parents, or our uncaring spouse, or an ignorant government, or an unjust god – most of us feel that we have been handed a raw deal. In contrast, ancient nature-based wisdom, along with virtually every spiritual tradition that exists on this earth, asserts that the only way out of this cycle of suffering is to
acknowledge how our system reacts to outside influences, and to always ask “what is my role in all of this?”

All traditions of holistic medicine are founded on the observation that our bodymind’s interaction with external influences, viruses and spirochetes included, is more important than the presence and exact identification of the pathogens themselves. In Chinese medicine, for instance, bacterial or viral afflictions are called “external evils,” which depending on their accompanying symptom picture are further classified as “wind,” “damp”, “heat,” etc. At the same time it is acknowledged that these external factors will not only always be there, but that they constitute a necessary part of every healthy ecosystem. Without movement, moisture, and warmth no life can exist.

When we venture into a forest, we see that moss and lichen and insects and mushrooms grow everywhere. There is not a single tree that does not have something growing on it. The more advanced eco-sciences have shown that all such species play a positive role in the forest system; each can take over and consume a tree only if it is already rotted from within. The less we know about the complexity of the environment, however, the more we are driven by the urge to “purge” it and to “clean it up.” Our post-war generations have grown up surrounded by plastic and nylon and glass and cement, all of which look clean and antiseptic, whereas nature exhibits warts and bumps everywhere and appears wild and scary. As modern humans, we want to hose down the trees with pesticides and get rid of the lichen. As a species, we don’t really know how to respect the intelligence of nature and the complexity of living systems anymore. If we would look with an electron microscope at our skin, we would literally see billions of bacteria crawling around on it. In our gut, there is even more activity, and that’s actually what keeps us alive. We are not robots made from steel or plywood or plastic, but we are alive because we consist of the microbes inside of us. If we are operating from a place of fear, however, and hose down this fragile system with antibiotics and steroids or other substances that severely interfere with the self-regulating forces of the body, we end up suppressing and killing the life forces inside us.

Ancient doctors, therefore, never worried much about the external aspects of a disease. More than 2,000 years ago, Chinese practitioners called an infection like Lyme xuxie zeifeng, meaning “deficiency-based opportunistic wind.” From this perspective, any infection is opportunistic – it looks for an opening (deficiency) in the body’s defense system. In my state of Oregon, for instance, there are lots of hunters who test positive for Lyme, but they don’t exhibit symptoms and thus don’t have Lyme disease. They might begin to manifest symptoms when later on in life they experience crisis, such as a car accident or a divorce, leading the system to be in disarray and giving the Lyme a chance to erupt and take over. So from this perspective, it is the weakness of the immune system of the host that causes the disease, not the presence of the spirochete. In my approach to Lyme, therefore, I carefully avoid imitating the approach of modern medicine by hosing
down the patient’s system with a battery of herbs that mimic the effect of antibiotics.

Spirochete infections, especially, are similar to fungal infections in that they are totally systemic in nature. The Chinese medical literature thus describes their quality “as oil seeping into flour.” Spirochetes and other biofilm-secreting organisms are capable of developing a truly parasitic relationship with our immune and hormonal systems. The only way to get rid of them sustainably, therefore, is to rebuild our system’s ability to defend itself and throw off or at least control these influences. The ultimate goal of the healing process is to repair the patient’s immune system, which most often has been damaged by antibiotic abuse during our childhood and teenage years – that’s the disease, not the exposure to Lyme. This explains why some people who have been bitten by a Lyme-infected tick experience no symptoms whatsoever, while others have mild flu-like symptoms, and others yet become so violently ravaged by symptoms of body pain, mood swings and anxiety that they can’t do anything but lay in a dark room for decades.

From an even deeper perspective, I personally see the epidemic proportions of this disease in recent decades as a symbol of growing disrespect for both our external and internal environments. On one hand, industrial development and the associated side effect of global warming benefits certain pathogens that are moving northward. Malaria, syphilis and other Lyme-like pathogens have always existed in tropical regions. On my property in the Pacific Northwest, however, we’ve never seen mosquitoes and other insects with infectious capability until about three years ago. We are thus all bearing responsibility for changing the greater environment with our life-style choices. On the other hand, we have dramatically diminished our immune forces as compared to what they were less than a 100 years ago. Thanks to the detailed documentation left behind by the 20th century researcher Weston Price, we know that the average adult male today exhibits only 10% of healthy gut bacteria and 10% of sperm count when compared to similar measurements conducted in healthy people during the 1940s. In my experience, these shocking numbers are directly tied to modern dietary habits and the habitual intake of antibiotics.

REGINA: In your work you talk about how a lot of the treatments for infections in the Western world are more bitter and cooling versus the more warming influences that people really need. Is there a way that Western people can understand that better or differently?

HEINER: From a generalized perspective, it can be said that all ancient civilizations – the Chinese, the Sumerians, the Indians, the Mayans, the Egyptians, the Greeks and possibly even the Romans – have worshipped the sun. The solar forces have always been regarded as the main source of life on our planet. Chinese medicine is built upon the principle that solar yang qi warms, invigorates and heals, and most likely all other classical systems of medicine
take this principle as their foundation, as well. From a modern naturopathic perspective, treating disease always involves stimulation of the *vis medicatrix naturae*, the healing power of nature as it manifests within our own body. These are different terms for the solar forces that make everything thrive in nature, both outside the body and inside. From an energetic perspective, antibiotics, steroids, painkillers, surgery, chemotherapy and radiation all exert a cooling effect on the body. “Cooling” is like cranking up the forces of darkness and night and shutting down the solar forces. We need cooling, of course, because if the heat and light of the sun were always in our face, we would burn to a crisp and everything would become a desert, which would also mean certain death. From the perspective of Chinese cosmology, however, the cooling forces of darkness are relative rather than absolute – meaning that yang represents the main force of creation and healing, which then needs to be punctuated by cooling yin periods in between. This is similar to getting a massage, which will work best if there is a rest period afterwards so that the stimuli received can reverberate within the system.

In general, as people of the modern industrialized age we tend to distrust the powerful forces of nature. We therefore feel safer if we can control the wild things – shut down the various urges of life, shut down complexity, shut down all things we don’t understand. We are doing that in every aspect of our lives, not just in how we look at the body, but at the land and our planet in general. The practice of modern agriculture and the concurrent decimation of plant and animal species on earth are also tied to the fear of nature’s power and complexity. Industrial fertilizers and pesticides demineralize the soil, and have a similar “dark” and “cooling” effect on the land and what grows on it, as does the use of antibiotics – anti-life substances – in medicine. The same holds true for architecture, city planning and global economics – there is hardly a city on the planet where there’s not a McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken anymore. Everything is becoming less and less diverse and more and more the same. The diminishing strength of the life forces on a global level, and along with them the wildness and diversity they spawn, parallels the “cooling” and “shutting down” processes we have initiated in our own bodies. As I mentioned earlier, we know that we now have only 10% of gut bacteria and sperm count in comparison to healthy people who lived a mere 70 years ago. From the Chinese perspective, those phenomena are all manifestations of yang qi deficiency – lack of the solar life forces inside of our bodies.

From a natural medicine perspective, the only way to rebuild these life forces inside of us is to teach the body to heal itself rather than to curb its self-regulating mechanisms further with life-denying modalities. In the realm of herbs, it is the bitter ones that are classified as energetically “cold” and that work similar to antibiotics. As children of the modern age, even natural medicine practitioners and herbalists have often become conditioned into thinking that for the control of inflammation, Lyme included, we must inundate the body with cooling herbs. Lyme self-help books routinely include long lists of substances that would be
classified as cooling or extremely cold in the Chinese materia medica: Andrographis (Chuanxinxilai), Wormwood (Qinghao), Japanese Knotweed (Huzhang), Goldenseal, Oregon Grape, etc.; when the real problem is that our patients don’t have enough solar immune forces (Chinese: taiyang) pulsing through their defensive layers, which is what enabled pathogens to establish a foothold in the first place. Now that full-blown disease has developed, degenerative processes ensue and further hollow out the body’s light. I therefore often compare Lyme pathogens to the Dementors in *Harry Potter*, which suck all light away, leaving only hopelessness and despair.

The herbal approach that I teach practitioners in my field is to base their formulas on warming herbs such as cinnamon, ginger and aconite; substances that invigorate the solar yang forces in patients who were seriously immune deficient at the point of infection. I may also recommend the addition of modifying substances that reduce localized heat and balance the pungent and warming effect of the yang herbs. But overall, it is my experience that constitutional remedies should be weighted on the warming or at least temperature neutral side. Unless the patient is 6 years old, or exhibits an acutely blazing bulls-eye rash accompanied by high fever – a true case of excess wind heat from the perspective of Chinese medicine – most of our Lyme patients tend to be cold, deficient and locked in a degenerative process. This means that they need to be warmed, opened and recharged with light rather than cooled, darkened and shut down even more.

A famous Chinese medicine quote says “*bu tong ze tong,*” which means “if there is blockage somewhere, it will lead to pain.” From that perspective, all of the various pain symptoms that Lyme patients typically experience result from energetic stagnation. Cold is the most congealing force in nature – when you cool something, you contract it and shut it down. Warming, in contrast, opens things up. Bamboo Pearls, for instance, is an herbal product I designed for patients suffering from joint and connective tissue pain (often diagnosed as fibromyalgia or rheumatoid arthritis, both potential sequelae of Lyme). The lead herbs in this remedy are cinnamon, ginger and aconite, all of which are warming and move the “solar” yang qi of the body. They are also recognized as major anti-inflammatory and anti-pain herbs from the perspective of modern laboratory research.

**REGINA:** How did the ancient Chinese look at the immune system? Did they have a way of describing or visualizing it?

**HEINER:** During the Middle Ages in the West there was a dramatic image called the *Ouroboros*, the dragon that bites itself in the tail. Both the dragon and the snake once used to be celebrated as symbols of nature’s vigorous life force, not just in the East. Outside of the negative portrayal of snakes and dragons in the Christian tradition, they stood for the positive forces of nature, a visualization of what is called qi in Chinese medicine. Qi means breath and steam and energy
and function, and is also called yang qi – the self-renewing and all-creative solar force. The dragon is drawn like a reptile and mythologically submerges itself in the water – a symbolic image of the life forces in a state of rest during nighttime or winter. It can also soar in the sky, portraying the life force in a state of expansion and outward activity during daytime and summer. The dragon, therefore, stands for the rising light forces of nature that form the foundation of our immune system and all processes of healing. The proper Chinese medical term would be yang qi, a solar type of energy that circulates everywhere, enervates all tissues and brings with it nutritive fluids – this, in a nutshell, is the ancient Chinese vision of how the microcosm of our body functions and defends itself.

On a more detailed level, the cosmographers of ancient China divided the various states and functions of this same life force into twelve different stations. In nature, these would be the twelve months of the year, during which the sun appears to pass through the twelve stellar constellations of the zodiac. Parallel to this annual journey of the sun, they devised a medical system that describes twelve basic functions of our vital force. These are the so-called twelve meridian systems of Chinese medicine, and if we believe in the efficacy of this system, it includes the totality of all bio electromagnetic, biochemical, mental, emotional and spiritual processes of human existence.

The human body features an incredible degree of complexity and sophistication, which we are beginning to glimpse only now. As a Nobel prize winning biochemist once calculated, if we wrote down every chemical reaction that happens in a single liver cell in only one second, it would take us a hundred years of reading twenty-four hours a day to finish it all – our body is that complex. The methodology of ancient people was to simplify this level of complexity, and categorize all of the body’s processes in groups of similar functions. This is, in essence, the "science of symbols" that we find in Sumer, Egypt, India, China and all other high civilizations of antiquity. The Chinese, specifically, conceived of a way to describe both the spheres of macrocosm and microcosm in terms of different numerological systems: two (yin-yang), three (Heaven, Earth, Humanity), five (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water), six (taiyang, yangming, shaoyang, taiyin, shaoyin, jueyin), all the way up to sixty-four (the 64 hexagrams of the Yijing).

When it came to the body, the Chinese described this flux of natural energy primarily in terms of twelve. The original system first shows up in written form in documents created around 350 BC, describing in detail the movement of the sun through the course of the twelve months of the year. Several hundred years thereafter, we find descriptions of twelve meridian networks in the human body that are deliberately based on the earlier macrocosmic circulation model. It is therefore important to recognize that the organ models presented in most ancient medical systems, Chinese medicine included, are not based on anatomical observation of the body – cataloguing how many tissue lumps there are inside of
our body cavities – but that they represent a process oriented, functional system of medicine.

“As above so below” is the alchemical statement that sums up all holistic medical traditions in East and West. In the body, we have twelve functional systems; the Spleen, for instance, functions within the body like the forces that unfolded themselves during the fourth month of the year in central China, and the Heart functions like the forces that were at work during the summer solstice in the fifth month. The sum total of these forces – or really just one circulating solar force that assumes twelve different postures along the way – covers the totality of bodily functions, including what we nowadays call the immune system. Half of these functional networks are in charge of moving the energy out, into the skin and muscles, into the head, into the extremities, while the other six are in charge of returning the life forces to a state of storage deep inside the body’s invisible batteries.

When we get sick, whether it is the common cold or Lyme disease, the proper circulation of yang qi in and around the body’s various parts gets compromised. This disturbance registers in the form of brain fog, poor appetite, gas and bloating, surface sensitivity, aversion to wind and cold, or alternating hot and cold sensations, or other signs of stagnation of the body’s life force.

REGINA: I understand that with traditional Chinese medicine you can send a very targeted signal to the body?

HEINER: Classical Chinese medicine is truly a science in its own right. You don’t need to have a Western medical diagnosis first in order to come up with an assessment and devise a treatment plan. As I outlined earlier, Chinese medicine features twelve functional systems that all work together, by supporting each other, controlling each other, and balancing each other at different levels. No ancient Chinese medicine doctor would have said, “Oh, you are inflamed, it must be this bacteria or that virus, and within those it must either be malaria or borrelia or babesia or bartonella or rickettsia or ehrlichiosis. This level of specificity is the business of Western medicine.

Chinese medicine, in contrast, is big picture medicine. A Chinese herbal remedy is quite literally called a fang, which means “ballpark remedy.” So as a doctor, you don’t need to conduct scores of expensive diagnostic tests fishing for specific infectious agents. But what you do need to do is to be in the diagnostic ballpark and go into the right direction with your treatment. A typical Chinese medicine practitioner will ask, “Is the main issue in the Spleen? Is it in the Lung? Or is it in the Triple Warmer or the Kidney?” And then, in addition to zeroing in on the right “ballpark” with acupuncture or massage, you can choose from a plethora of herbal formulas to support the specific constitutional needs of the patient every day. At last count, the most voluminous dictionary of Chinese herbal formulas contained 98,000 different remedies that were recorded in the Chinese medical
literature some time during the last 2,000 years. That gives you an idea of the depth and complexity of this science, as well as its capability to devise a highly specific and individualized treatment protocol. From a Chinese perspective, all herbs target specific meridians like a missile, or affect several meridian systems at the same time. The practitioner can therefore create a remedy that is targeted toward a specific organ network – more toward the Spleen, or more toward the Liver, etc.

**REGINA:** One system within Chinese medicine is the Five Elements and the organ pairings, but is there another way of looking at things that has to do with the level of penetration of the pathogen?

**HEINER:** For completeness sake, I should indeed mention that the full system of Chinese medical diagnostics includes the so-called Five Phase Element system that I referred to earlier. In addition, there are is the system of the so-called Six Conformations, which is often referred to in English as the Six Layer way of diagnosing. Within this system, most Lyme patients with degenerative neurological processes belong to one of the yin (cold and yang deficient) layers of disease penetration, *taiyin* or *shaoyin* or *jueyin* or a combination thereof. But in the end, these are just different ways of characterizing the nature of the twelve major functional relay systems that we have been speaking about all this time. The Liver, for example, is one of the twelve systems, but on the level of the Five Elements it is classified as a Wood system, while on the level of the Six Conformations it is labeled as *jueyin*, the deepest and most complex of the layers.

**REGINA:** So it actually gives you more of a three-dimensional picture of what is going on?

**HEINER:** Yes it does: when you refer to the Liver as the organ network associated with the phase element Wood, thus evoking the image of sprouting vegetation, Liver function is compared to the upwardly mobile yang powers of the spring season. When the Liver is referred to by the epithet *jueyin*, its deeper and more substance related yin aspects are underscored; the Liver “stores the Blood” according to Chinese medicine. Jueyin, moreover, means “counterflow yin.” Big trees are typical representations of the Wood element in nature. Sequoias, for instance, can move enormous amounts of water skyward against the force of gravity. The so-called Jueyin Wood organ system in humans, therefore, is portrayed as a functional network capable of circulating Blood and other essences against the flow of gravity to the head and other places located high up.

From a Chinese medicine perspective, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and other degenerative disorders of the brain are often associated with severe circulation issues in the head, caused by weakened *jueyin* – circulating blood against the pull of gravity – function. If somebody is diagnosed with a *jueyin* disease – which
can also relate to the Pericardium, but most often involves the Liver – it means that the disease has advanced all the way into the Liver, compromising the specific function of bringing Blood circulation to the eyes, the hair and the brain. Jueyin represents the deepest of the six layers of disease. When people experience a heart attack or stroke, for instance, their condition is most likely preceded by a chronic problem that started 20 years ago, which finally evolved into a deep and serious circulation problem causing life-threatening damage.

REGINA: People with Lyme can experience inflammation of the epithelium (the blood vessel lining), which can be a scary thing for people who are dealing with that. Western medicine doesn’t seem to have any answers for that other than procedures where people are having their neck vein opened up and balloons put in the vein. Does Chinese medicine have a different take on that particular manifestation of Lyme?

HEINER: Yes, I believe it does. I most often diagnose patients with this particular complication of Lyme as suffering from a jueyin disorder, leading me to an herbal prescription called Danggui Sini Tang (Four Cold Extremities Decoction With Angelica Sinensis). This is the representative remedy for jueyin disorder in the 1800 year-old herbal classic Shanghan lun – the Treatise on Disorders Caused By Cold; or, if teasing out a bit more of the esoteric depth in the translation, Treatise on Disorders Caused by Compromised Storage of Solar Yang Qi. There it is again, the importance of yang qi. The Shanghan lun is a book that recommends a lot of ginger and cinnamon and processed aconite.

REGINA: That’s so fascinating because the Western world sees a problem in the epithelium as a sign of inflammation, but really it’s the contrary, it’s a deficiency.

HEINER: Yes, the nature of this problem is indeed deficiency based. The English word inflammation is obviously related to the term “flammable” and the idea that fires need to be controlled and extinguished. If somebody injures a leg and the tissue becomes swollen, we generally follow the knee-jerk impulse to get the swelling under control by putting an ice pack on it to cool down the body’s over-reaction. Figuratively speaking, that’s also what antibiotics, steroids and painkillers do. Their desired effect is like an ice pack that reigns in the body’s reactions. When the real reason why the foot is swollen – because the body is trying too hard to get its own healing energy there – is ignored and remains unaddressed. The less healing energy is available, the more our body tends to become desperate, overreact, and become uncoordinated in its natural response.

If we help to support its natural momentum, on the other hand, i.e. with Chinese trauma remedies that often include cinnamon and are intended to increase local circulation, the swelling subsides because we are working with the body’s natural intelligence rather than against it. In the system of Chinese medicine, external injury trauma is generally regarded as a cold influence on the body, rather than
as something that’s hot and needs to be calmed down. Similar reasoning can be applied to the blood vessel inflammation in the chronic stages of Lyme disease. As part of my approach to Lyme and other disorders that involve degenerative changes in the nervous system, I devised a remedy called Evergreen Pearls. It is based on the classical jueyin remedy Danggui Sini Tang I mentioned, and intended to increase microcirculation in the neck and head region, i.e. in cases of Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, MS and the epithelial issues you mentioned. In addition, it can increase circulation all around. In modern China, Danggui Sini Tang is therefore often used as a frostbite remedy, because it is recognized for its ability to bring warmth to and restore circulation in the extremities.

The biggest thing Chinese medicine has to offer in regard to your question, of course, is its system based diagnostic and treatment approach. In the context of modern Western medicine, a blood vessel issue requires that we see a doctor who specializes in circulatory disorders. A nervous system problem – oh, you need to see the neurologist. An inflammatory problem – you’ve got to see the infectious disease specialist. Overspecialization is a serious problem in modern medicine, because it leads to a way of looking at the body that does not consider the complex ways in which the body’s functions are intricately intertwined.

Chinese medicine, and all true forms of holistic medicine along with it, are expressions of what we now call systems science. Portland State University, for instance, features a Systems Science Program that trains graduate students how to see connections between seemingly unrelated fields and systems and functional entities. That is, in a nutshell, the ancient way of looking at things: the recognition and celebration of how the functioning of nature’s varied systems are mirroring each other holographically. That is precisely what yin-yang theory and the symbolism of the Five Phase Elements are, linking the way the planets circulate the sun to the way electrons orbit the nucleus of an atom, or to the way in which energy circulates in the human body – exactly the same principals apply! In the domain of Western science, however, one of them would be examined by an astronomer, the other by a quantum physicist, and their work and interests most likely have little or nothing in common.

The observational disciplines of ancient China, however, have only one scientific language: the language of symbol science that keeps coming up in this conversation. Chinese medicine is the perfect example of a very complex and evolved systems science. It describes how different things and functions are related, rather than dividing them into different academic fields and terminology boxes. Chinese medicine, in essence, wants to take into consideration how nervous system inflammation does affect the blood vessels, and how the blood vessel issues, in turn, can potentially affect the bones, or how either of them can bring about pathological changes in a person’s connective tissue.
REGINA: Listening to you speak about multiple specialists not seeing the relationship between things, that is the complete reality of Lyme patients right now, because of all the different manifestations of symptoms.

HEINER: That is exactly what I see in people who come to my clinic. They bring documents from different specialists and say, “I have Hashimoto’s,” or “I have lichen sclerosis,” or “I have interstitial cystitis,” or most typically “I have a host of autoimmune problems, and then also this other digestive issue called SIBO (small intestinal bacterial overgrowth syndrome), plus my gum and cognitive problems.” Most often I say fairly soon, “It looks to me that you have only one disease – Lyme, or a type of Lyme-like infection.” From a Chinese medicine perspective, this means that I will focus on the underlying problem of yang qi deficiency, plus the “wind” and “damp” pathogenic influences that opportunistically entered the system. Rather than focusing on seven different diseases, I will treat just one.

Being given the diagnostic runaroud is one of the tragedies associated with Lyme. That is why it is such an expensive disorder, because not only do most insurance companies not pay for treatments associated with a Lyme diagnosis, but also patients often find themselves hiring multiple specialists in order to find out what in the world is going on with them, often without obtaining conclusive answers in the end. The Chinese medicine approach, other than making it difficult for the borrelia pathogens and/or co-infections to stay in the body long-term, is to treat the underlying deficiency that allowed the Lyme to take a foothold in the first place. The result is that the multitude of symptoms will slowly – and this is important to understand – SLOWLY fade into the background. If the patient is too focused on immediate symptom relief in specific areas, this journey has the potential to become a frustrating experience.

REGINA: Some people with Lyme are diagnosed quickly, have a bulls-eye, take their antibiotics for 3 weeks, say, “I’m fine” and never have a problem again. Then there are so many people who take antibiotics and the treatment doesn’t work for them. It’s hard to know if those people who claim to be better really are, because a lot of them say, “Well, I still have some weird symptoms, or I can’t exercise like I used to.”

HEINER: There are two thoughts that come to mind with regard to why some people take antibiotics at the appearance of bulls-eye rashes and get better, and why others don’t. For one, the immune status of the patients was most likely different at the time of infection. And, there is also the possibility that patients think at the time that they are all better, but what they have really done from the Chinese perspective of the six layers is that they’ve driven the pathogen deeper into the system by taking antibiotics. In the beginning, the flu-like symptoms, the fever, and the rash may indeed disappear, but the pathogen is now situated at a deeper level, where it eventually will affect the fascia, the nervous system or other internal places. I encounter that situation a lot! A patient may say, “I once
had Lyme 20 years ago,” and I ask, “Why are you here now?” and the answer is “I have a lot of brain fog and chronic joint pain.” I most likely will tell the person, “You’ve probably have carried Lyme for all these years; your present problems are still Lyme related.”

In these cases, the Lyme pathogens were simply pushed deeper into the body, where they either caused a host of chronically progressing symptoms immediately, or waited their turn until the immune system became weak enough for them to wreak havoc – because of reduced immunity at old age, or a car accident, or emotional trauma caused by divorce or similar shock to the system. Then it roars back with a vengeance, often decades after the initial infection.

I see this often with Lyme, but also with people who used to live in exotic locations; Peace Corps volunteers, for instance, who once contracted malaria or amoebic dysentery, and then took the standard antibiotic Flagyl. They felt initially “all better,” but since that time their health was never the same. Ten years down the road, they get diagnosed with Crohn’s disease or another serious autoimmune problem, without anybody relating their “new” condition to the previous history of infection. The truth is that the pathogen has been in the background causing low-level mischief all the time, but has now reached critical mass and the body can’t fend it off anymore. Overreaction and complex autoimmune problems follow.

REGINA: If someone walks into your clinic with a recent tick bite and a bulls-eye, how would you treat them?

HEINER: I hear this question a lot, both from my patients and my students. I agree with many of my fellow health care practitioners that there may be a time for antibiotics in the treatment of Lyme, but only at the beginning. According to my observation, they should not be used for a long time, or later than six months after the initial infection. Since I am a Chinese medicine practitioner, I prescribe Chinese herbs for patients who do not wish to take antibiotics; generally a high amount of the combined remedies Lightning Pearls and Dragon Pearls for about 3 weeks. These were designed to drive out “wind” and “heat toxins.” In other words, they are as close to the effect of an antibiotic as an herbal remedy can be, but without the potential side effects.

REGINA: Does that treatment actually expel the Lyme pathogen?

HEINER: That is the intention. For this to happen, however, the quality of the herbs needs to be pure and potent, and the amount taken needs to be fairly high in order to kill off all of the pathogens before they’ve multiplied too much and penetrated into deeper layers of the body. Lyme is a bit like the AIDS virus – for the first few days the pathogen is very vulnerable, but then it becomes entrenched, systemic and extremely hard to get rid of. If someone is afraid of not taking antibiotics at this stage, I recommend that they take a lower dose of the
herbs alongside the antibiotics. The herbs will attack the pathogen on another level, and prevent it from going deeper and establishing a systemic foothold.

The best thing after experiencing a fresh tick bite is to save the tick and send it off within 24 hours, that way one can obtain objective results as to whether borrelia is present in the tick. This way is especially useful considering the fact that presently there is no single blood test that is able to diagnose Lyme definitively. Many people who have it test in the “non-conclusive” titer range. That’s why in my lectures and articles on Lyme, I focus on the traditional Chinese method of observing subjective symptoms, and typically advise: “If you have body pain accompanied by mysterious neurological symptoms, plus wildly fluctuating mental-emotional symptoms, plus one or more digestive symptoms, plus indications of autoimmune activity, you’ve got Lyme – don’t wait for some test to confirm that.”

REGINA: I was curious about aconite – is there a certain point at which you start to use it with a Lyme patient?

HEINER: In general, I see three phases in the treatment of people with chronic Lyme. The first phase focuses primarily on getting rid of the “wind,” let’s call it reduction of the pathogenic load or latent inflammation. Lightning Pearls, Thunder Pearls, and Dragon Pearls are major remedies addressing this phase. The second phase represents a gradual shift toward tonification of the deficiency that allowed the Lyme to become systemic in the first place. This process of recharging the immune batteries is most effectively done with aconite, but the extremely hot and dry nature of this herb requires expert skills in classical Chinese differential diagnosis to determine if and when and how much and for how long aconite may be needed. The third phase, finally, is when there is very little or none of the original inflammation left, and the therapeutic focus has shifted to recharging the life batteries exclusively, with Vitality Pearls, for instance, or other aconite based classical remedies such as Fuzi Lizhong Tang (Regulate the Center Decoction With Aconite) or Qianyang Dan (Submerge the Yang Pellet).

The older a Lyme patient is, the longer s/he has had Lyme, and the more deficient s/he was to begin with, the more likely it is that the pulse may reveal signs of Kidney yang deficiency – indicated by a flooding quality in the Kidney position, particularly on the left hand side. This is generally a clear indication that the so-called Fire of the Vital Gate (mingmen) is not rooted anymore, and has become like a leaky battery. The patient typically feels exhausted, yet at the same time anxious and unable to sleep, possibly suffering from palpitations. Together with the Kidney deficiency pulse, these symptoms are indicators that the primarily excess oriented treatments need to be accompanied by an immediate grounding of the ultimate source of immune fire. This is best accomplished by adding aconite to the formula mix. I start out treatment with phase two in at least a third, if not half, of my Lyme patients.
It is very important to point out to lay people, however, that I am talking about traditionally grown and diligently processed aconite from a very specific location in China. The classical insistence on using the right kind of aconite was so important to me that I founded my own herb company, just to be sure that the aconite I use for my patients is the right one. In unprocessed or under processed form, aconite can be extremely toxic.

REGINA: Getting through Lyme can be a long haul. Do you have any emotional or spiritual advice for people going through that experience? In homeopathy, Lyme is part of the so-called syphilitic miasm – with symptoms of despair and feeling unclean, like, “something is wrong with me.” What heals that?

HEINER: I think that all people who suffer from Lyme or a similar type of disease are like canaries in a coalmine, manifesting in their body what ails our planet at this time, ahead of everyone else. I remember one of my dear Buddhist colleagues from China, Dr. Liu Lihong, who teaches his students to deeply surrender and endure the hardships of life. He himself, however, tends to be a rather squeamish person. One time he had a hangnail in his toe, and asked his wife to remove it. During the span of an entire hour, every time she brought the pliers close to his toe, he would pull back and scream, “No, no, no – please: I can’t do it, I can’t do it!” Finally, he imagined that his pain was somehow of benefit for the world, and all of a sudden he was able to allow his wife to execute the procedure, and then he didn’t feel any pain.

Part of the “syphilitic” quality of Lyme is that it mires patients in a severely limiting net of self-involved and inherently selfish emotions. This particular miasm is therefore not only about feeling unclean and hopeless (“it’s never going to get better”), but there is also this dramatic narrowing of the patients’ worldview: “It’s all about me – my pain, my suffering!” This is, in essence, an exaggerated version of the emotional state of modern man; thus the canary in the coalmine metaphor.

When a person’s nervous system is inflamed, the sense of suffering can be immense. At the same time, there is a sense that the suffering has to be endured alone. It’s like, “I am the only person who is truly suffering, the only person who has a miserable life.” It is this sensation that makes the process most unbearable. Just like its flip side – the narcissistic way in which we live inside our “healthy” modern existence – Lyme typically brings out a uniquely self-involved way of suffering. It must be pointed out in the strongest possible terms that this particular mental-emotional state represents the modus operandi of the pathogen, which should never be confused with our true self. One of the possible diagnoses for Lyme disease in Chinese medicine is Gu syndrome, which literally means “possession syndrome.” It is of vital importance to recognize the self-involved drama nature of the disease as a typical part of the “possession.” For those of us who have the misfortune to be afflicted by Lyme, this group of
pathogens will most likely bring us to exhibit an exaggerated degree of the highly self-involved nature of postmodern consciousness.

Similar to Dr. Liu’s example, a potential antidote to this miasmic expression of selfishness is to surrender into a greater sense of cosmic awareness, in which we know: “No matter what, everything is connected, and everything has a purpose, even this seemingly purposeless, torturous disease. There is a meaningful kernel in it that helps me to evolve, perhaps even plays a part in the evolution of the planet as a whole.” Quite a few of my spiritual teachers have said that the greatest teacher of all is disease. Even Lyme, therefore, perhaps the loneliest and most torturous of all diseases out there, represents an opportunity for transformation, no matter how strong the sense of pain and suffering and hopelessness may be at times.

REGINA: There’s a Sufi saying, “Die before you die.” Are there perspectives from the Sufi tradition that inform your work with Lyme?

HEINER: I believe that every spiritual path is aimed at the same goal of human evolution. The Sufi path, as I understand it, is a distinctly gnostic path; that means a focus on cultivation toward a higher degree of consciousness in this lifetime, rather than liberation after death. Many people actually find their way to one of the time-honored traditions of gnostic practice when their back is against the wall, pushed by disease to participate in a more active form of walking on our human path. Recognizing disease as a stepping-stone in this universal process can be a first glimpse of light.

Each path has its own flavor. The Sufi path, in particular, is about falling in love with the divine and purposeful nature of existence. Lyme has a tendency to suck out any sense of hope and purpose – back to the Dementor image from Harry Potter. Looking at life and the role of disease through the lens of the syphilitic miasm, there is no purpose, only meaningless suffering without any light behind it. The messages in Rumi’s poetry are good examples of the Sufi approach to life. They evoke a state of being drunk with love for this world, celebrating every moment as a manifestation of divine purpose. Sufi wisdom is therefore a direct way to help return the light that has been taken by the Dementor-like Lyme pathogens. In the bigger picture, of course, these are nothing but manifestations of a more universal form of darkness and possession, which we ought to recognize as a common human ailment of the 21st century.

REGINA: I’m the child of two doctors and so grew up in the mindset of non-holistic medicine. I’ve had to really work on the mental transformation of not thinking about the pathogen. It’s a deep task, to change one’s mind on that.

HEINER: Yes, indeed! As children of the scientific revolution, all of us have been conditioned to think in a very linear, black-and-white kind of way. It thus takes a while to integrate our modern propensity for clearly defined details with the
system-based approach of the ancient wisdom traditions. A general piece of advice that your comment brings up is the following: whenever we walk on the path of fear and confusion as Lyme patients, it helps to remember that we are experiencing part of the disease’s shadow side – it is part of the possession, rather than a feeling that accurately reflects what is really happening. And once again, this principle does not just apply to Lyme; Lyme is but an extreme form of this universal phenomenon. I work with a wide array of people from different countries and strata of society in my multiple roles as university professor, international lecturer, businessman and health care practitioner. Every day I face the reality that modern people, myself included, will naturally tend toward a fear-based approach when stressed. For most of us, to simply trust and surrender is very difficult to do.

I am privileged to be surrounded by people who have a deep interest in holistic living, and who aspire to be different. When I take groups of students and colleagues to Tibet, however, all of us tend to be geared up to the hilt, with state of the art Gortex clothing, Power Bars, high tech water filters, rescue blankets, sunglasses, and medications that cover all kind of potential emergencies. Our Tibetan guides, in contrast, wear canvas army shoes when crossing snow covered passes at 17,000 feet, and dry themselves in front of a fire when it rains. With just a bit of yak butter and barley flour in their saddlebags, they take the journey one day at a time. And they look at us with eyes that say, “What is going on with these poor people, what are they so afraid of?” Life is so exciting! It’s a blessing that we don’t know what tomorrow will bring – a joy rather than something to be afraid of. This fear that grips all of us “healthy people” early on becomes amplified in the Lyme patient, who tends to be afraid and paranoid of just about everything. This is because the nervous system is inflamed, inducing a constant fight or flight response even if nothing is happening.

REGINA: Thank you so much for all of these thoughts. I think this information is helpful to share with people, because people don’t know that there’s another option to treat Lyme.

HEINER: Thank you for all your work in this arena! I just returned from a lecture tour on the East Coast, where I was teaching different groups of Chinese medicine practitioners. Wherever I went, I saw a tremendous need to address this silent epidemic. “We need a Lyme certificate training,” many participants said, “because almost everybody I see in my clinic has Lyme, and there doesn’t seem to be a viable alternative to antibiotics. We really want to work with them on a constitutional level, but need an in-depth training to be able to address all of the phases and complex symptom contingencies of this disorder.” I am, therefore, in the process of developing a one-year Lyme certificate training for alternative health care practitioners. My hope is that this will lead to a substantial referral list of trained practitioners in every area of the country.
REGINA: Once that is set up, it will be a year before you are referring people?

HEINER: Right now, www.ClassicalPearls.org already features a list of Chinese medicine practitioners who work with our herbal formulas, many of which were specifically developed for the treatment of Lyme. That's a good place to start. Classes associated with the certificate program will start in early 2016, but it will take a year for the first class of graduates to emerge from that and become formally listed.

REGINA: Will that program be online or at the school in Portland?

HEINER: It will be a combination of two weekend seminars conducted at my house in Portland and/or a suitable retreat center at the East Coast. In addition, there will monthly 4-hour webinars that can be accessed at ProD Seminars; those can also be viewed by the general public. So, most of it will be accessible online. If anyone is interested, it would be best to sign up for the monthly newsletter at www.ClassicalChineseMedicine.org to stay tuned for directions on how to participate in this program.

REGINA: I understand you are interested in building a healing center for treating complex illness?

HEINER: Yes, I have been working on this plan for years now. So far, I have secured 350 acres of land in Eastern Oregon. It includes a sacred spring where local tribes used to bring their sick for therapeutic bathing until the settlers arrived in 1860. The land is remote and features some of the best air and water quality in the country. I am interested in this project because the alternative medicine professions are ready to take the next step.

From a purely quantitative perspective, Chinese medicine has developed rather rapidly in recent years. 47 states feature acupuncture licensing, and there are more than 60 accredited degree programs now. Unfortunately, the desire for official recognition has caused the profession to limit itself severely, i.e. by pigeonholing itself as a modality for the treatment of shoulder stiffness, low back pain, sports injuries, allergies and the likes. But ancient medical systems, Chinese medicine included, have demonstrated for millennia that they are capable of healing serious ailments. Yes, if somebody has a serious car accident or life-threatening asthma attack Western emergency medicine is probably your best bet. But for so many of the chronic diseases of our time that remain without real answers or solutions, Chinese Medicine has significant options to offer.

This step, however, requires the development of inpatient treatment centers where people can stay overnight and where results can be documented. It is important for the preservation of our human dignity to have a place to go to when sick, and where doctors and caretakers understand what’s going on. Chinese medicine has the potential of providing care on this level, but presently lacks the
capacity to do that – not because people are not well meaning, or because practitioners are not good enough, but because no such facilities exist in the USA to date.

We may be the richest nation in the world, but we are also the most impoverished. I have lots of wealthy clients who don’t know what to buy when they are in the grocery isle of the supermarket. We don’t know how to cook and celebrate our food anymore. And most of us don’t know about basic health threats in our immediate environment, and how to protect ourselves from them. The profession needs a center, therefore, where not only herbs are prescribed and acupuncture treatments are administered, but where patients are taught how to change their lives in fundamental and meaningful ways once they return back home.

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