

Ren Fa Di – Human Beings Follow the Earth



A Discourse on Human Participation in the More-Than-Human World as it Relates to Nature Cure in the Classics of Chinese Medicine

ABSTRACT

The dual degree program in both Naturopathic and Classical Chinese Medicine offers the unique opportunity of simultaneously studying the intricate theory and philosophy of both medical paradigms. The ideas common to both systems comprise the foundation of the model of healing recognized as Nature Cure. Inherent to the theory of Nature Cure is the definition of health as an adherence to the basic laws and energy patterns of Nature. The origin of disease is viewed as noncompliance with Nature's laws. When the behavior of a human being, or of a community of human beings, diverges from these laws, the natural harmony of the macrocosm is disturbed. As a result, the vibrational state of the human body is similarly altered. When one lives out of harmony with the laws of nature, one gets sick. Historically, the role of the physician in both Naturopathic and Classical Chinese Medicine was to first recognize the imbalances manifesting in the human being as disease symptoms and then to look towards identifying the root of this imbalance by turning to the study of what is out of balance with the relationship between Human Beings and everything else that is not human; the more-than-human world.

Naturopaths, like the Daoist medical sages, were concerned with understanding how man can best conform to the laws of nature. However, over time medical theory in the west increasingly lost touch with the science of developing and defining the laws of Nature. The founding Naturopathic Nature Cure practitioners, such as Priessnitz, Kneipp, Lindlahr, and Lust are credited as instigating the medical revolution that is known in the West as Nature Cure. They brought the "Return to Nature" philosophical approach back to Western medicine.

The system of correspondence has withstood the unfolding of historical events in China, and has remained an integral part of the system of Chinese Medicine. Chinese medical practitioners assist their patients back into a concordance with the laws of nature. Treatments utilize acupuncture and herbal formulas to restore the internal balance of vital force, while at the same time they align and harmonize the physiology of the human being with the macrocosmic energy patterns of the Universe. The root of Naturopathic and Chinese Medicine are one and the same. That is, to define the laws of nature and then to live in accordance with them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
ABSTRACT	5
I. BACKGROUND	7
II INTRODUCTION.....	12
III. PARTICIPATION IN THE NATURAL WORLD.....	16
A. More-Than-Human World.....	16
B. Knowledge and Wisdom	21
IV. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NATURE CURE.....	32
A. From Then to Now	32
B. Hippocrates and Hellenistic Nature Cure	36
C. Galen and Nature Cure.....	39
D. Paracelsus	40
E. Empiricism vs. Rationalism.....	45
F. Hydrotherapy	47
G. Naturopathic Nature Cure	51
V. THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE NATURE CURE AND SYSTEMATIC CORRESPONDENCE	60
A. Yi Jing	64
B. Classic of Poetry	68
C. Confucius	70
D. Laozi.....	72
E. Zhuangzi	75
F. Huainanzi.....	77
G. Huangdi Neijing	79
VI. VITALITY, DISEASE AND NATURE CURE.....	94
A. The Healing Power of Nature.....	94
B. Disease Pathophysiology: Divergence From Nature's Laws.....	100
VII. RETURN TO NATURE.....	118
VIII. CONCLUSIONS	125
IX. REFERENCES.....	130

I. BACKGROUND

My wife, Brigitte, was raised in Hochgallmig, a small town nestled high in the beautiful mountains of Tirol, Austria. She was influenced by an alpine culture that aspired to live in harmony with nature. Comprised mainly of farmers whose daily life is governed by the will of the mountains, this culture views health not in terms of medical technology but as a balance of self amongst the external landscape. The air they breathe, the food they eat, the conditions they work in - in essence, the total environment - are all vital components to living a healthy life. The traditional Tirol culture that I became intimately familiar with, like naturopathic medicine, strives to create a healthy world in which humanity may thrive. Hochgallmig has become my spiritual home. Here my mother-in-law fed me all natural food, made me “heaven key” tea from flowers grown on the mountain, and graciously began to teach me some of the means to live naturally. It is here amongst this culture and this alpine landscape where I really feel the closest to *my* nature.

Tirol and all the images it conjures is a symbol of my true home. It is a place where I can both physically and mentally turn towards along my journey when I am in need of comfort. On one visit in July of 1997, Brigitte and I spent the summer working on a nearby alm. This is a type of dairy farm isolated from any village, nestled in the high peaks of the Tirolean Alps. Two years before this trip, I was diagnosed with Crohn’s Disease. At this time I was feeling very ill – both physically and emotionally. I was in severe pain, had no appetite, and there were even periods of time when I would vomit literally every day. I had many struggles and painful events to deal with in my life up to this point. One of the most traumatic was the internalization of a family secret that I, alone, kept from certain members my family for many years for their protection. In addition, I had always wanted to be a physician, but after graduating college I knew it wasn’t right for me to go off to an allopathic medical school. My undergraduate education revealed the complexities of political and business influences on medicine and their effect on medical decision making. This, coupled with difficulties I witnessed for my father who had an integrative practice pioneering in the treatment of Chronic Fatigue

Syndrome patients, discouraged me from entering the profession I had always longed for as a boy. I was dispirited, lost, miserable and very, very ill at the time of this trip.

I was in dire need of soul searching. I had to. I was miserable, and my dispirited emotions and negative attitude were clearly inflicting damage to myself and family. I didn't know how to search my soul, but I knew I had to make changes in my life. Prior to this trip I bought books that were supposed to help, but of course I didn't read them. I was in crisis and something had to give. Up here on this mountain I cried out. I really poured my soul out to whoever was listening. "What am I doing here? What is my path? Why am I so sick? What is the point to all this misery? Somebody. Anybody. Please help me!"

A day or two later, while hiking up the mountain alone, I realized that I no longer felt sick. I felt alive again. I was still lost, but at least I felt well. I had been drinking water from a crisp, clean mountain stream, been breathing fresh unpolluted mountain air, and had been eating simple, unadulterated and very nourishing food. I walked further up the trail. I took time to gaze out upon the distant mountains, I walked amongst the most beautiful magenta mountain roses, and cupping my hands I drank directly from a tumbling spring. The water was just so alive and vital with energy. I sensed it knew a secret; something that it had been waiting for eternity to let me in on. I heard *it* by means of my ears, while I felt *it* reverberate deep inside of me.

Puzzled, I climbed still further up the now narrowing path. It was here, amongst the evergreens, the blue birds and field mice, and in this particular spot on this very large Earth, in this place in which my heart recognized as



A tumbling stream up on the Alm

home, that I heard *it*. It spoke to me. Don't misunderstand me, *it* wasn't a burning bush, but *it* was a voice. It was strong and powerful, and it said matter of factly, "THIS IS ME. This is how I need to live my life. I want to live in tune with nature, I want to help people, everyone - not just the sick - to learn how to live healthy. I want to learn and I want to teach. My path in life has led me to this."

It was my voice, but it was not me who was speaking nor even thinking these words. It was much deeper. My spine shivered, my hairs stood on end. The richness, the tone, the meaning – came not of me, but through me. It was myself, self actualized, reincorporated with it's source.

"Don't even think about turning around," myself and the source continued on. "Your path lies in front of you. You cried out for help and nature has answered. You saw the self that you knew you always were. That arduous path you are on is quite necessary. At each twist and turn you gained necessary experience for the forks ahead. And now your path has led you to a cusp that is both personal and historic. Healing has come full circle. History has led medicine back to nature. Medicine has been on its own convoluted path and it sits today in front of the same fork that you now see before you."

The novel "Ishmael" by Daniel Quinn identifies people as either Leavers or Takers. He defines Takers as people who have a disastrous premise that the world belongs to them, while Leavers believe that man belongs to the world.¹ Modern humanity has mostly subscribed to the Taker premise, which has led man down the path of destruction and disease. But there are many people who are choosing to take a different path. A path with a sign attached which reads: "Return to Nature". Many of the naturopathic and Chinese medical students, alumni and faculty of NCNM have chosen this path. It is my fundamental belief that humanity is indeed coming full circle, and collectively, we are

right now at a junction. If we choose to follow the Leaver premise, then creation can go on forever and humans can bask in the infinite wisdom of nature - we can experience true healing.

It is a common belief amongst indigenous cultures that the most learned and powerful healer will be one who has first learned his or her skills directly from the land itself, from a specific animal or plant, from a brook or a mountain peak, during a prolonged sojourn out beyond the boundaries of human society. They undertook a solitary quest for vision; rendered themselves vulnerable, as shamans and healers, to the wild forces of the land, and if needed, they cried out to all of Earth's living things for a vision, for teachings, and for the power to heal themselves, their human community, and their mother Earth. I feel like I have gone through this very same walkabout.²

Two years after starting the naturopathic program at NCNM, my path, the path nature has chosen for me, lead me to the gates of another great opportunity – the study of Classical Chinese Medicine. Chinese medicine has really been an inspiration for me. It has already helped me rethink and understand holism and interconnectedness in a way that better matches my ideology. It is an embodiment of thousands of years of knowledge of how to live in balance with nature. Classical Chinese Medicine, in combination with Naturopathic medicine, is helping me to become the physician, and human being that I had hoped to become. My goal is to learn how to live in balance with nature and to teach others what I have learned. In so doing I hope to heal myself, others and every participant of this more-than-human Earth.

I love my education here at NCNM thus far, but I have also begun to perceive a side to this profession that I find a little alarming. Often, I have felt that my studies have been tilted in favor of too much objective structure and rational mechanism and not enough more subjective experiential learning. Our studies teach us to remain current with the most updated protocols based on scientific evidence based research. We implement physical exams, run lab tests, where white coats and even have our own pharmacological formulary. I have had experiences at our clinic, which have made me worry that a

Naturopathic Doctor (ND) is trained to substitute isolated herbal constituents and supplements for allopathic drugs. I, like many of my other colleagues, had to address the question of what separates a Naturopathic doctor from a medical doctor? In our desire to fit into the modern landscape of health and healing have we left behind the heart of our medicine - the *nature* in *naturopathic* medicine? Have we forgotten the Naturopathic battle cry *Return to Nature!?*

Because I aspire to become a Leaver, I occasionally felt that my Naturopathic medical instruction was out of balance. Because of my desire to study nature, to reconnect my Qi, my vital force, with the animate world that engulfs me, I was drawn to Classical Chinese Medicine. This thesis is an attempt to bridge the gaps I have perceived in naturopathic theory and practice, and to reconnect naturopathic Nature Cure with its roots – the systematic study of human health and disease as it relates to the laws and energetic patterns of nature.

¹ Quinn, *Chapt. 3*, pp. 53 - 80

² Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 116

II. INTRODUCTION

Vis medicatrix naturae - the healing power of nature - is the core tenet of a system of medicine known as Nature Cure. This power describes the healing ability inherent to the body that is governed by the laws of nature. The word nature has many connotations and meanings in our society. I have come to understand nature to mean the Universe, with all its phenomena. Nature - being both the sum total of the forces at work throughout the universe and the elements of the natural world, such as mountains, rivers, plants and animals - is ordered and intelligent. The human body has a natural state, and when it is thrown into disequilibrium the body experiences “dis-ease”. Human biology is self-regulating, it naturally corrects and adjusts to reach a homeostatic equilibrium. Nature Cure practitioners acknowledge that the nature of human biology, as the nature of the Universe, is to maintain equilibrium. It is my belief that a physician’s primary role is to identify and remove obstacles of equilibrium and to facilitate and augment the natural healing ability both within the individual and also within the larger community.

The early developments of both Western Medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine began with the expression of the human condition in terms of a more-than-human world; a world where humans actively participated with all of the phenomena and manifestations existing in the Universe. Both systems were predicated on the observation that energy patterns observed in nature not only influence the human body but are observed themselves in the body. What occurs in the macrocosm also occurs in the microcosm. Although this was a core tenet shared by both systems’ theoretical composition, the two have recently diverged.

While Classical Chinese Medicine (CCM) remains rooted to the observation that the laws and energetic patterns of nature are the same laws that govern human health, Western Medicine now follows the premise that the human body is governed by the laws of biomechanics and physical equations – a human derived explanatory model far removed from the originating source energetic pattern itself. Naturopathic medicine, which is rooted in the Hellenistic sciences of Hippocrates and Galen, has remained attentive to the laws and energetic patterns of nature. However, Naturopathic medicine, which also has

developmental ties with modern Western medical science has of late found itself struggling to identify with which camp it belongs to.

CCM is based on the experience of humans as “subject” in an environment of a geocentric universe, where the body is treated as a microcosm that follows macrocosmic laws and is continually informed by macrocosmic influences. It is based on the age-old knowledge of the movement patterns of the universe, which are at the root of our body’s transformative processes. In CCM, the physician is the intermediary to the sacred, cultivating the dual roles of the shaman and the sage, connecting above and below, inside and outside, energy and matter. The CCM physician aspires to the Dao of medicine, a process which requires the actualization of his/her individual path by working to become a self-realized being using Qigong meditation, music, calligraphy, painting, poetry, and ritual journeys. He first seeks to thoroughly understand the workings of his own body transformations, and then naturally becomes a teacher who is capable of instructing others how to regulate their body’s Qi metabolism and hence, reconnect to nature.

Nature Cure, one of the principle and founding modalities of naturopathic medicine, is the link that has the most potential for reconnecting medicine in the Western world with its roots in antiquity. The model of health according to Nature Cure is that health is the normal and harmonious vibration of the elements and forces composing the human entity on the physical, mental and moral planes of being. Disease is viewed as an abnormal or inharmonious vibration of the elements and forces composing the human entity on one or more planes of being.¹

Vincenz Priessnitz (1799-1852) of Graefenberg, a small village in what is now the Czech Republic, is credited as being the first figure to set in motion the forces which would lead to the development of the modern naturopathic profession and bring the return of hydrotherapy (a major component of Nature Cure) to the western civilization. Priessnitz devised his patient’s treatment on an individual basis, according to their daily state of health. In addition to eliminating harmful influences on patients, detaching guests from

their normal day-to-day problems, and giving them hope and a new sense of happiness for life, a fundamental part of the cure was the act of returning the patient to nature.

Priessnitz' spa was centered high on a slope of the Rychlebske Mountain Range, 620 meters above sea level. There are over 50 springs flowing through the area surrounding the spa, in addition to the numerous awe inspiring vistas and paths. It was a site of natural beauty. Accompanying the hydrotherapy administered at the spa, Priessnitz would have patients take showers in the woods, engage in manual chores like sawing wood, and was often known to send his patients outside, with bare feet, to drink water from various distant forest springs. Priessnitz valued activity in fresh air, often saying that "if I did not have water, I would have healed with air." He forced patients to take therapeutic walks in nature instead of staying in the dismal atmosphere of a hospital. He took his urban patients, oftentimes members of the aristocracy and wealthy classes, off their high horses (sometimes quite literally) and put their feet back in contact with the earth. Priessnitz believed their medical problems often stemmed from their distance from the natural life of the peasants and working class. In essence, he showed his patients how to live in harmony with the laws of nature – how to return to nature.

It is my assertion that the above-mentioned essence of Naturopathic Nature Cure is now missing from current naturopathic medical practices. The naturopathic profession has been successful in extending and refining the art of using water to heal, but the act of using these methods outdoors, reconnecting human beings with nature is very rarely realized. Hydrotherapy techniques and other Nature Cure procedures, if they are even performed at all, are for the most part carried out indoors in an almost mechanistic manner detached from the animate landscape. I feel the naturopathic profession needs to get back to the integration of Nature Cure and the more-than-human external environment. Coupling these forces can only lead to an increase in treatment effectiveness and will return Nature Cure full circle to the way it was intended, a means and mechanism to help people return to nature.

People have to change their minds in how they are living. As Naturopaths, it is our responsibility to guide our patients to live a life in accord with Nature's laws, to leave their life of being Takers and to ultimately become a Leaver. Quinn through his fictional primate protagonist Ishmael, explains the importance of reaching out to others to promote a lifestyle and relationship with the Earth that is non adversarial, but instead participatory.

As long as the people of your culture are convinced that the world belongs to them and that their divinely-appointed destiny is to conquer and rule it, then they are of course going to go on acting the way they've been acting for the past ten-thousand years. They're going to go on treating the world as if it were a piece of human property and they're going to go on conquering it as if it were an adversary. You can't change these things with laws. You must change people's minds.²

It won't be easy, but this is one of our greater tasks as healers. It will be a challenge to determine what, in fact, are Nature's laws, and to what extent it is possible to live in accordance with them. It is impractical to suggest immediate transformations, but my aim is to guide individuals along a path of increased awareness and participation in a community of the natural world; a trail which leads in the direction of increased health, higher vibration, and greater vitality for human beings and the more-than-human world.

¹ Lindlahr, *Philosophy of Natural Therapeutics*, p. 19

² Quinn