

## THE QUINTESSENTIAL SINCERITY OF THE THERAPIST

### Practitioner/patient interaction: the therapeutic bond

There is always a relationship between present beings. This relationship is even stronger when these beings focus on one another, direct their attention from one to the other, as is the case between practitioner and patient. What occurs in the treatment is also what occurs between them.

A general way of approaching this relationship is to consider it as a specific case of exchange of the *qi* (氣), in which the beings are constantly interacting with things they reach and things that touch them.

Most beings interact by following the models inscribed into their nature, without ever really being able to deviate from them. The human beings are different, since they are responsible for the movement of their own *qi*, and the manner in which they act and react. This implies that the practitioner as well as the patient is responsible for what happens in their relationship since they are both responsible for the exactitude of the movement of the *qi* within themselves, meaning how well they conform to the natural model.

One who has truly and profoundly understood the nature of the different *qi* and the five organs, can correctly interpret the signs shown by the body, the attitude, the emotions, the mind and the spiritual state of the patient. For this interpretation, the practitioner uses the models offered by knowledge and reasoning that are founded upon analogy, images (*xiang* 象), experience, and deduction. He likewise cultivates within himself that which gives quality of mind, which opens perception and intelligence, and allows for just ideas or intent : *yi* 意<sup>1</sup>. The practitioner may then carry out treatment.

When the practitioner presses his fingers on a patient's artery or stares into the patient's eyes, a contact is established in both of them which reaches the true depths of their beings. Nothing must distract them. Ideally, nothing should interfere then in the contact made between spirits, beyond clear consciousness. Through palpation and gaze, the practitioner is already giving signs to the patient through his blood and *qi* (*xueqi* 血氣)<sup>2</sup>, but they are signs that he has no control over and that he is not aware of, because it is the quality of his vitality, as they are at work within the practitioner, rather than in an action undertaken voluntarily. This quality is constructed day after day and cannot be faked ; it comes from the essential sincerity (精誠) that is found for example in the *Zhuangzi* or in the *Huainanzi*.

*By 'the Truth (zhen 真)' I mean purity and sincerity (jing cheng 精誠)<sup>3</sup> in their highest degree. He who lacks purity and sincerity cannot move others. Therefore he who forces himself to lament, though he may sound sad, will awaken no grief. He who forces himself to be angry, though he may sound fierce, will arouse no awe. And he who forces himself to be affectionate, though he may smile, will create no air of harmony. True (zhen 真) sadness need make no sound to awaken grief; true anger need not show itself to arouse awe; true affection need not smile to create harmony. When a man has the Truth within*

<sup>1</sup> In English the rich and complex notion of 意 is rendered using various translations: meaning, intention, interior disposition, idea.

<sup>2</sup> The blood and *qi* (*xueqi*) carries that which allows physiological life, but also that which expresses psychological life. The *xueqi* makes what is in the Heart present in all places in the organism, including the capacity to know and to perceive, everything that makes mind/spirit and consciousness, any change in the mind or in the emotion. All malfunctions are inscribed into the vital flow and its rhythmic and are therefore perceptible in the pulses.

<sup>3</sup> To be perfectly pure and to be perfectly faithful to one's true nature.

*himself, his spirit (shen 神) may move among external things. That is why the Truth is to be prized! (Zhuang zi 31, B Watson)*

It is more by what we are actually, in our deep reality, that the patient qi is moved than by any technics or knowledge, even if they remind necessary. Technics and knowledge are like the earthly aspect of the therapeutic work; but it is put in use only by the heavenly aspect, Heaven in us, the pure heart that is the heavenly heart.

*Thus, when the sage embraces his Heavenly Heart (tian xin 天心), his voice can move and transform the world. Thus, when his Quintessential Sincerity (jing cheng 精誠) is stimulated (gan 感) within, an embodied qi responds (ying 應) in Heaven. (HNZ 20, Queen & Mayor)*

*Now the reason why an arrow can be shot for a long distance and penetrate a hard substance is because the bow is strong, but the reason it can hit the tiny center of a target is due to the human heart (to the uprightness of the heart, zheng xin 正心). Rewarding goodness and punishing wickedness is for government decrees, but the reason they can be carried out depends on Quintessential Sincerity (jing cheng 精誠). Thus, though a bow may be strong, it cannot hit the target on its own. Though a decree may be enlightened, it cannot be carried out on its own. They must be grounded in Quintessential Sincerity in order to be effective. Thus if the ruler applies the Way to the people and they do not follow him, he has not exercised a sincere heart (cheng xin 誠心). (HNZ 20, Queen & Mayor)*

*Thus the Great Man conforms in Potency (de 德) with Heaven and Earth, conforms in brightness (ming 明) with the sun and moon, conforms in numinous efficacy (ling 靈) with the ghosts and spirits, and conforms in trustworthiness (xin 信) with the four seasons. Thus sages embrace the qi of Heaven and enfold the heart of Heaven (tian xin 天心), grasp centrality and embody harmony. They do not descend from the ancestral temple, yet they journey to the Four Seas. [Everywhere] they alter habits and change customs, so that the people transform and become good as if it were their own natures. This is because [the sages] are capable of transforming [others] like a spirit (shen hua 神化). (HNZ 20, Queen & Mayor)*

All practitioners know that sometimes when the pulse is being taken or a palpation or other similar kind of contact is being made, that an image or a piece of information may arise within himself that does not come from conscious knowledge or reasoning, but rather imposes itself and most often reveals itself to be important. However, this knowledge can never be used in a repetitive manner. The practitioner must likewise remain suspicious of the influence that his own desires and tendencies may have upon what seems to arise spontaneously within himself. The patient, or some expression of his qi may induce a reaction in the practitioner's mind/spirit without his knowledge. The practitioner must remain alert to the possible effects of the patient's qi upon him, as well as to his desires and his own tendencies that may influence his discernment.

Whatever the case may be, the interaction between practitioner and patient is present in a complex manner, even when it seems that only the practitioner acts and that the patient is merely passive.

The practitioner must also detect in himself all beginnings of emotions, desires or passions so that his sanity, reasoning, perceptions and interpretations remain clear and proper. They must build and develop their quintessential sincerity.

### Speech and word in the relationship

In addition to the questions he asks, the practitioner can also speak to the patient. He speaks in order to give him advice or simply to exchange. One thing or another that he says may touch or move the patient's spirit, initiating in him the process of healing and transformation.

The right word is not codified. It doesn't come from applying a technique. For there is not the same kind of reflexion on speech in these texts as we know it today in the Occident. This is not talk therapy, but rather a kind ear and an apt speech coming from a well cultivated and incessantly cleared Heart.

The speech which « touches » the patient is a human speech that springs from the relationship, under the condition that he who pronounces it has been inspired. The practitioner must thus work on his sources of inspiration, cultivate his interiority and clear his Heart.

The therapist on the other hand has a duty to inform his patient:

*« It belongs to the intrinsic dispositions (feelings, qing 情) of the humans to loathe death and to delight in life. Inform them on what can destroy them (their life); tell them what can be good for them. Advise them on what is convenient for their condition. Expose what brings them bitter suffering. Even if they are this kind of person who do not follow the Way (who are without principles, who do not follow the patterns of the natural order of life), how would they not listen to you ? » (Lingshu ch.29)*

人之情 · 莫不惡死而樂生 · 告之以其敗 · 語之以其善 · 導之以其所便 · 開之以其所苦 · 雖有無道之人 · 惡有不聽者乎 ·

What makes it so the patient listens to and hears the practitioner ? Experience has shown that it is neither the truth of what he says, nor the degree of the patient's intelligence, nor even the fear of death or suffering that brings about an enduring modification of behavior.

It's something that touches him. Here we return to the « quintessential sincerity » (*jing cheng* 精誠) of the practitioner and of the opening that the treatment and all the signs given to the patient conspire to make appear. The only way is to empty one's heart, to become spirit like, to be one with the natural process of life.

### The Heart<sup>4</sup> void as a therapeutic posture

Purification is internal and goes beyond a simple attention to behave properly. It is a diminution of desires and a softening of will, in order to arrive at the serenity that alone may allow for full use of spiritual intelligence (*shen ming* 神明).

---

<sup>4</sup> The word Heart is used most of time as a simplification to signify a reality encompassing the spheres of emotion, affect, psychology, intellect, thought, knowledge, conscience, as well as internal or spiritual realization.

It is said that in order for the practitioner to cultivate correct apprehension of the signs given by the patient, from the way the person of the patient presents himself, the practitioner must refine his perceptions. Refining his perceptions so that they are shrewd and subtle, does not happen through the accumulation of knowledge, even if this is necessary for the technical side of the action. It happens by realizing the interior potentialities of the Heart that fundamentally reside in his capacity to open to the process of life beyond thoughts, utterances, formulations or images. It is the Heart void that allows proper reactions to situations to arise in oneself, taking into account everything that the mental state can perceive, the intelligence can understand and also all that is constantly escaping this apprehension. This is « quintessential sincerity *jing cheng* 精誠 ».

This thus concerns a way of life, a constant practice. It cannot simply be an attitude put together for the length of the treatment or for the time during which the practitioner interacts with the patient. It is the practitioner's internal reality.

*« Blood and qi (xue qi 血氣) are the splendour of man and the five organs (wu zang 五藏) are his essences (jing 精). When blood and qi are concentrated in the five organs and not dispersed outside, then chest and abdomen are replete, longing and desire diminish. When chest and abdomen are replete, and longing and desires diminished, then ears and eyes are clear, hearing and seeing acute. When ears and eyes are clear, hearing and seeing acute, that is called illumination (ming 明)<sup>5</sup>. » (Huainan zi ch.7 - transl. Monkey Press, Jingshen)*

是故血氣者，人之華也；而五藏者，人之精也。夫血氣能專於五藏而不外越，則胸腹充而嗜欲省矣。胸腹充而嗜欲省，則耳目清、聽視達矣。耳目清、聽視達，謂之明。

Reference to this is easily found in the passage on the « fasting of the Heart » in the *Zhuangzi* ch.4 :

*« Unify all what is in your mind; don't listen with the ear, listen with the heart-mind (xin 心); [even better] don't listen with the heart-mind, listen with the qi [the qi of origin, the qi of heaven present at the root of every being]. What we listen is limited to the ear. The [working of the] heart-mind is limited to recognition. But the qi is the void itself, waiting for all things. The way to proceed (dao 道)<sup>6</sup> assembles only in this void (xu 虛). The void is the fasting of the heart (xin zhai 心齋). » (Zhuangzi ch.4)*

若一志，無聽之以耳而聽之以心，無聽之以心而聽之以氣。聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也

Once the void is created, everything may be present and coexist, without anything presenting itself to thought clearly and separately. Correlations are made, not because they are known and applied, but because they correspond to the real, or at least a reading of the real that prevents the approach from getting denatured. It is spontaneous, instantaneous, or beyond time, arising like a sketch of the idea or the direction to follow. The words come next, the memory of knowledge and of the experience articulating and defining the action, the completed therapeutic gesture.

<sup>5</sup> 明 : the interior light enlightening intelligence and allowing to it act according to the very movement of life.

<sup>6</sup> Here *dao* has the meaning of the course of action, what gives the rule of conduct. What inspire the behavior, the discernement, the action.

## The Heart intention / intuition

A passage from the chapter on Interior work (*nei ye* 內業) of the *Guanzi* shows that the intent, (*yi* 意) comes from the Heart like a sketch of a thought that hasn't been spoken yet, of an unspecified idea. However, everything that happens in the spirit and the mind, everything that decides upon the path to action and determines its quality, comes from this.

*« By means of the mind (heart, xin 心) you store the mind: Within the mind there is yet another mind.*

*That mind within the mind: it is an awareness (yi 音=意 intent) that precedes words.*

*Only after there is awareness (intent) does it take shape; Only after it takes shape it there a word.*

*Only after there is a word is it implemented; Only after it is implemented is there order<sup>7</sup>.*

*Without order, you will always be chaotic. If chaotic, you die. » (Roth) (Guanzi ch.49, Neiyue)*

心以藏心，心之中又有心焉。彼心之心，音以先言，音然後形，形然後言。言然後使，使然後治。

It could be said that the practitioner's true speech, the one that touches the patient and « moves » them, comes from the intention emanating from a Heart emptied of all thought and all desire. The pure intent, coming from an empty heart, is intuit, intuition at its best.

The practitioner is often not even aware of the reach of what he says, because he speaks without any personal will or purpose, with no end in mind. Some idea or word appears in his heart-mind, from the process of assemblage taking place in the void of his heart; they just come from the reality of the relationship and of the present situation.

In one way or another, everything that happens in the therapeutic relationship fundamentally depends upon the quality of the practitioner's internal disposition (*yi* 意).

## Nurturing the intention / intuition

The Heart void is one condition. Another facet is fullness : that from which the practitioner nourishes his mental state and his spirit, his knowledge and memory, that which forges his consciousness and his person, that is to say his Heart and its functioning.

The *Great Learning* (*da xue* 大學)<sup>8</sup> places the emphasis on the importance of the intent (*yi* 意), between knowledge of beings and things and self correction.

*« Wanting to cultivate themselves, they first corrected (zheng 正) their minds (xin 心).*

*Wanting to correct their minds, they first made their wills (intent, yi 意) sincere (cheng 誠).*

*Wanting to make their wills sincere, they first extended their knowledge. Extension of knowledge consists of the investigation of things. When things are investigated,*

*knowledge is extended. When knowledge is extended, the will (intent, yi 意) becomes*

*sincere (cheng 誠). When the will is sincere, the mind (xin 心) is correct (zheng 正). When the mind is correct, the self is cultivated. » (Transl. A. Charles Muller)*

<sup>7</sup> Even if this is not the first meaning of this text, the character 治 may be read, and it is also the one used for « treat ».

<sup>8</sup> The Great Learning is one of the Four Books in Confucianism

先脩其身 · 欲脩其身者 · 先正其心 · 欲正其心者 · 先誠其意 · 欲誠其意者 ·  
先致其知 · 致知在格物 · 物格而后知至 · 知至而后意誠 · 意誠而后心正 · 心  
正而后身脩

Sun Simiao, in his preface to his major work, the *Qianjinfang* 千金方, insists upon the necessity of the practitioner correctly and fully nurturing his knowledge before speaking of his state of mind. It is recommended for one who wishes to become a great practitioner to study the classics of medicine, including all the branches such as acupuncture, moxibustion and herbs, but also to become familiar with techniques of divination and the models it uses, and then to cultivate himself by reading history texts, those expounding Confucian thought, the Taoist approaches (including the practices of the *yangsheng* 養生) and of course, the Buddhist sutras. The goal is not to spread oneself too thin or to become a scholar, but to train one's discernment, to forge the tools of investigation. All of this knowledge, if it has been understood and correctly assimilated, participate in the elaboration of an authentic intention, the root of the true relationship with the patient, and of an enlightened diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

By way of conclusion, let us quote Sun Simiao's preface, in which he sets forth his idea of the perfect practitioner :

*« Whenever a great physician treats diseases, he has to be mentally calm (安神) and his disposition firm (定志). He should not give way to wishes and desires, but has to develop first a marked attitude of compassion. He should commit himself firmly to the willingness to take the effort to save every living creature. » (Transl. P. Unschuld)*