

Shiva And Chinese Medicine

There's nothing quite like a catastrophic natural phenomenon, like an earthquake, hurricane, or tsunami, to prompt some serious pondering about the meaning of it all. Such events are so unexpected and shocking that they force us to ask difficult questions, regardless of whether or not we are personally affected. For example, in the aftermath of the South Asian tsunami, some spiritual leaders openly admitted questioning the existence of God,¹ while others felt their faith was strengthened.² One columnist pointed out that in such situations, there is just no useful rational response, no clear choice, no "therefore we should do this" option as there often is with man-made disasters.³

However, if there can be no rational response, perhaps there is a non-rational or energetic one. And if so, what does Chinese medicine (CM) have to say? After all, cataclysmic natural events represent large energy shifts and on a personal level, big shifts are often associated with a healing crisis. So, as practitioners of energy medicine, we might be in a position to see things from an entirely different perspective.

In Vedic philosophy, material manifestation is said to have creation, preservation, and destruction aspects. These 3 facets, that arise from the *Parabrahman*, are represented by a trinity of Gods: *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Shiva*, who create, preserve, and destroy, respectively.⁴ Natural disasters then are in the domain of Shiva, which makes him at first glance a rather frightening character. Of course, Shiva is not inherently bad, but rather an inextricable part of the whole, and perhaps the most difficult aspect of reality we must engage as we strive to rediscover our original wholeness. Ram Dass puts it like this:

"....In the Ramayana, Ram says over and over again, 'unless you honor Shiva, you cannot come to me.' That is, until you have fully embraced the existence of chaos – *chaos!* – you cannot go through the door. If you want to be a preserver of love and beauty, you've got to be able to look at the destruction of love and beauty with wide-open eyes and say, 'Yeah, right. And that, too.' In nature there is creation, preservation *and* destruction."⁵

We can see the same motif described in CM through the Five-Element model. In this philosophy, Yang emerges from the Tao, which itself remains as Yin (Water), to become undifferentiated Heart/Mind (Xin).⁶ This Heart/Mind fusion might be understood as the creative Brahma, who is experienced as the sense of "I am," and represented by the Fire element. One could say that the relationship between Brahma and Parabrahman is similar to the CM relationship between Yin and Yang, Fire and Water, represented energetically in the body as the Heart/Kidney axis. Next Vishnu, like the Wood element, preserves our sense of presence by controlling the flow of Qi. And finally, Shiva, like the Metal Element, mediates over the process of destruction and letting go.

Yet, dangerous as he is, Shiva paradoxically can renew life by destroying ignorance and lead us back to our wholeness through a perspective shift engendered by right understanding of life energies. Though capable of terrible destruction, Shiva is equally capable of engendering a profound transformation in those who manage to safely negotiate the wave of transpersonal energy to a renewed sense of self. Remarkably, in that vein and with all due respect to those who were killed or injured, many who survived the Asian tsunami did so by literally riding the wave until its energy was exhausted, sometimes being deposited relatively unscathed some distance inland.

As horrendous as the devastation in South Asia has been, it is amazing to witness how the events have resulted in an outpouring of compassion in the collective consciousness, a phenomenon that might be understood as the opening of the trans-personal Heart. People have come together; money has poured in; centuries-old hatreds have temporarily dissolved; countries have opened their borders to refugees. A bond of unity has become apparent beyond national identities and ideological differences. Through the shared pain of horrific natural circumstances, we seem to have discovered our common humanity, revealing the underlying reality that at the deepest level, *we are all one*.

Shiva's gift for humanity then, both personally and collectively, is nothing less than an opening of the Heart and the acquisition of transpersonal insight. The *knots of Vishnu and Shiva*, said poetically to be located in the Heart and forehead chakras, respectively,⁷ are loosened as we intentionally surrender to the potential chaos of the Water element. Without Shiva, there is no renewal, no healing, and no possibility of a new beginning. Instead, there is only stagnation and rigidity that, energetically speaking, is a kind of living death.

Since most patients requesting acupuncture have stagnation of one kind or another, if they wish to get things moving again, they must intentionally let go of ego-imposed control of the flow of Qi, a decision that risks plunging them into the chaotic transformational vortex of the Water element.⁸ Such a process can be regarded as voluntarily petitioning Shiva. However, from the ego's point-of-view, the idea of relinquishing control of suppressed psychic energies is so viscerally repel-

lent that in the normal course of events, a full surrender rarely occurs.⁹ That being the case, when Shiva shows up uninvited, we should hesitate to jump to hasty conclusions. Frightening as they may be, near-death encounters can facilitate such a beneficial personality transformation that in retrospect, the experience may be reframed as a priceless gift. In such cases, Shiva bestows a sense of meaning, insight, and understanding in a way that no other therapeutic maneuver could mimic.

This understanding goes to the core of acupuncture philosophy. The letting go, characteristic of the Metal element, is a surrender of the ego's illusions of separateness, which coincidentally tears open the Heart center and opens us to the flow of transpersonal energies. Shiva destroys, yes, but in the wake of his destruction lay the seeds of a new intuitive and compassionate awareness. And since the macrocosm reflects the microcosm, Shiva's recent actions on the world stage might, in fact, be a prelude to a more Heart-centered collective consciousness, a harbinger of greater international understanding and cooperation, and a promise of hope for the future of a troubled planet.

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