

Review of *Acupuncture: From Symbol to Clinical Practice*

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Author: Jean-Marc Kespi, MD

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IF YOU HAVE EVER WONDERED why acupuncture texts sometimes describe strange and bizarre point indications, this may be the book for you. In *Acupuncture: From Symbol to Clinical Practice*, Jean-Marc Kespi combines his 50 plus years of experience with a near-encyclopaedic knowledge of point indications to provide elegant point choices for addressing practical clinical problems. He performs this apparently magical feat by moving his focus from the more-superficial or anatomical protocols to the deeper symbolic meaning of the points.

Kespi relates the notion of a symbol to the Chinese word *xiang*, which has been translated as, among other things, the “footprints of an elephant” (p. 157). This intriguing image refers to the idea that, although the physical elephant might not be there, the footprints give away the fact that its form exists. With that in mind, Kespi suggests that the visible and the invisible are actually one, and that symbols are the mediating intermediaries connecting the two. Given that acupuncture points carry symbolic meanings reflecting all levels of body–mind–spirit, the acupuncturist’s job is simply to find the point that best expresses a patient’s overall situation. Do it successfully, and voilà, 2 or 3 points, or even just a single point, can be used sometimes to resolve complex, long-term symptoms that have not responded to any other intervention. Using numerous case histories as teaching tools, Kespi weaves this powerful notion into every page.

In terms of approach and layout, Kespi explores many of the common Chinese Medicine (CM) themes. He begins by comparing and contrasting the customary Yin/Yang, East/West, and wave/particle dualities. From there he goes to discuss the CM organs, such as the Heart as Emperor, and the various ministers and their functions, complete with numerous case histories. He seems particularly fond of the

Triple Burner (TB), illuminating multiple connections for its alarm points. For example, one less–commonly used point mentioned several times in the text is CV 5 (*Shimen*, Stone Gate), the lower *jiao mu* point of the TB. Kespi says the name symbolically reflects a solid (stone) support for the breakdown of Qi, as in the case of someone who has lost his or her foundation as a result of grief over a lost relationship. He then describes his successful uses of the point for a wide range of clinical situations, such as in the case of a patient who had recalcitrant knee pain, after he spotted a “loss of foundation” experience in the patient’s history.

With similar discussions and case histories, Kespi covers the 6 main, 12 primary, and 16 *luo* channels, the musculoskeletal and Extraordinary channels, the Connecting and Alarm points, the Windows of Heaven points, imbalances of Qi Blood and Fluids, the diaphragm, the Extraordinary organs, the law of Midday–Midnight, the Four Seasons and the 5-phases.

There is a chapter on the symbolism of specific points. Here, he groups points with similar names, such as BL 12 (*Fengmen*: Wind Gate) and GV 16 (*Fengfu*: Wind Mansion), and provides an indepth discussion of Barrier and Command points. Acupuncture points, he writes, are “empty” like a mountain cavern (the Chinese word *xue*, used to denote an acupuncture point, also means a “cavern”), which symbolically refers the space where exterior and interior energies meet and gather. Later on, he returns to the concept of emptiness with reference to the practitioner–patient interaction. Emptiness, he says, is not *nothingness*, but rather, the gap between the spontaneous emergence of sequential phenomena, in which solutions are allowed to arise of their own accord. Kespi notes that one of his early acupuncture teachers mentioned this little secret to him, while cautioning that it would take many years to fully grasp its importance.

A couple of appendices at the end of the book provide charts of the musculoskeletal and primary channels, and information on specific points mentioned in the text. If I have any criticism of the book, it might be that the charts seemed a bit incomplete, while the points section could have

benefitted from the addition of the Pinyin and English names. However, these are small issues, because such information can easily be found elsewhere.

As a reader I felt at times as if I were sitting in Satsang with a revered teacher, while the master shared his many years of experience in a highly personal way. Yet then, afterward, I could not recall everything he said. This is a book which perhaps needs to be read and re-read, studied, and repeatedly referenced while trying to use points in clinical situations similar to those described in the case histories. Such a hands-on approach might be the easiest way to fully extract the immense wisdom and experience it contains. In that regard, *Acupuncture: From Symbol to Clinical Practice* may not be the most practical book for a

beginning acupuncturist. Rather, as a rich fount of ideas, knowledge, and experience, it might be better suited for more seasoned practitioners interested in refining their techniques and taking acupuncture to a deeper level. There is no doubt that I, for one, will be opening this book repeatedly for the next little while.

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