

Getting Earthed

To "earth" oneself - or someone else - has two slightly separate connotations in the traditions of Oriental medicine.

On the one hand it refers to a general grounding effect, which may be achieved in several different ways. We may for example, use techniques of sitting, standing or even moving that shift our focus inwards and downwards.

In manual treatment we may use shiatsu or bodywork techniques which move energy down in the body towards the hara, lower back, legs and feet. In acupuncture, points such as GB 21, St 25 and Kid 1 may be used to similar effect.



The result of this is a relative shift in the energy balance within the body; away from the head and down towards the feet, from heaven to earth. The result is invariably experienced as relaxing as the brain and heart are freed and given space to expand, whilst the legs and feet become warmer and our posture becomes solid and stable. This is viewed as the optimal energy balance within the traditions our work is informed by: it is usually the very first lesson in qi gong classes. In shiatsu, the same principle is embedded in the first part of a whole body treatment, where we often begin work on the back before working gradually down towards the feet.



There is a secondary but no less important aspect to this particular earthing effect. It involves an energy exchange with the earth itself: Mother Earth. With the downward flow of attention in the body towards the lower extremities comes a corresponding energy shift. As the energy reaches the soles of the feet, an exchange takes place involving spent and polluted or even foreign energy, which is able to flow down into the earth. She in her abundance is then able to send supplies of fresh energy up into the feet to be transported from there to wherever they might be required in the system.

This process could perhaps be likened to the earthing of electrical appliances - a dangerous excess of current is diverted down towards the earth where it is harmlessly absorbed. The big difference here is obviously that electrical appliances do not, as far as I know, receive fresh energy from mother earth in exchange. This is one of the reasons that so many of the "man-as-machine" or "mind-as-computer" metaphors fail to convince - the basic paucity in this kind of perspective on reality is glaringly obvious after a moment's reflection.

Regarding the benefits of earthing, a source as dry and dusty as Wikipedia describes the following under the sub-title of "physics and physiology":

A grounded body will not experience the voltages caused by static electricity and it will be far less influenced by environmental electric fields.

The physiological benefit pertains to the value of antioxidants for reducing oxidative stress. Antioxidants protect against such oxidation damages by providing electrons and grounding enables the earth to provide electrons which give the same benefits. Chronic inflammation, which can manifest as many different pathological conditions, is caused by electron deficiency, a condition which can be avoided through grounding.

Sinatra lists the following observed health benefits:

- *Reductions in overall stress levels and tension and a shift in autonomic nervous system balance from sympathetic to parasympathetic activation*
- *Reductions in immune cell and pain responses as well as in delayed-onset muscle soreness*
- *Reduction of primary indicators of osteoporosis, improvement of glucose regulation and immune response*
- *Altered blood electrodynamics, which decreases aggregation of red blood cells, thereby reducing blood viscosity*
- *Increase of heart rate variability*

The above effects of earthing might fairly be summed up as improving general health levels and slowing down the ageing process.

So far we have focused on the dimensions of the generalised earthing effect, involving a downward shift of energy towards and even an exchange of energies down and into and then up and out from Mother Earth.

There is, however, another rather more specific earthing effect which we in Oriental medicine can easily avail ourselves of. It involves the use of the Earth element and the Earth meridians - Stomach and Spleen. In our tradition Earth is a symbol for the centre. It stands for sources of nutrition and the transformation thereof into useable energy for the various meridian functions under the general regulatory control of the Triple Heater.

This earthing function then, has several new and additional aspects to the one discussed above. The kind of earthing we are now referring to relates to our experience of nourishment, support and love, how secure we feel on the earth, in our bodies and in our minds, how at ease we are in the total human situation as a spirit embodied; a being incarnated. We recall that the Stomach and Spleen control the "flesh", a term for which the Chinese use the character signifying meat: *carne*.

It is not always easy being a piece of meat, wandering the earth, trying to feel comfortable and at home in the world, trying to make ends meet.

There is a wonderful treatment created by Shiatsu pioneer Bill Palmer, a version of which I learnt from a colleague some years ago. Bill is an inspiration to many with his nose for sniffing out old and new approaches, then adapting and combining them to

make sense of each other. The protocol as I learnt it is extremely simple and very restful for both giver and receiver. It is performed with the receiver lying prone, or as we usually say: on their stomach.

This phrase suddenly becomes enormously significant when we realise that the receiver is literally lying on their stomach: their Stomach *meridian*. This realisation in turn reveals the staggering, unexpected wisdom in having one single Yang meridian located on this otherwise Yin surface of the body - a fact which in other circumstances leads to creased foreheads and strained, bent-out-of-shape theoretical explanations.

We realize that there is no contradiction at all and certainly no mistake in the grand scheme of things. We see that this is a perfect example of Yang within Yin. We realize that earthing can even be done lying down. So next time you are lying on your back, gazing at the clouds, take a few moments to turn over on your stomach and really get earthed!

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