

A Healing Mantra: Tan-tan, Moku-moku, Hyoh-hyoh, Niko-niko

by Takamatsu Bunzo

The beauty of Oriental medicine is its comprehensiveness. Except for surgery, it covers almost all the other areas, such as internal medicine, orthopedics, obstetrics, pediatrics, and even psychiatry. That psychology and physiology are one is the Oriental medical stance. We know mental states can directly affect our health. Having lived for 60 years, I can say that the words we utter can influence our mood to a great deal. Japanese Shinto principles state that words have power and can directly affect our health; this is called *Kototama* ("Word Spirit"). We can utilize *Kototama* for healing. I would like to introduce a healing technique using *Kototama* power.

"Tan-tan, moku-moku, hyoh-hyoh, niko-niko" are all onomatopoeic words that we associate with certain moods. I recite these daily like a mantra and I can definitely feel the positive effects on myself. Let me explain.

"*淡々* (tan-tan) means "constant free flow." Not to get bogged down with minor things. Not to get stuck with an idea or a thing. There is always an alternative. When we get stuck with one idea, our minds lose flexibility and get rigid. It's about doing with what we've got, yet without expecting too much. When we expect too much we lose the free flow. All we can do is our best, but the result is not necessarily in our control. Do not care what other people say or think, neither of which is in our control. Just immerse ourselves in the present task without expecting anything. Be calm equally in both good times and bad. Tan-tan connotes stability and constancy. We feel more at peace with calm, stable people. It is often hard to deal with people who are not mentally stable. Tan-tan can mean "detached." Not getting overly involved. It may sound boring to young ones, but as one gets older one better appreciates the value of detachment. 莊子 (Zhuangzi) said, "Friendship between gentlemen is like water." Water is always flowing and never sticky. There is a risk about getting too close to others, as the saying: "Familiarity breeds contempt" suggests.

黙々 (Moku-moku) to some extent overlaps with tan-tan. However, moku-moku connotes being diligent. Make no excuse about the work we do. Do not be afraid of working alone. Japanese people are basically artisans who are good at working diligently by themselves. Moku-moku literally means "quietly." Being taciturn used to

be a virtue of men in Japan. My father used to tell me, "Three words a day are enough for men." I never found out what those three words were, but I think I know what he meant. In my office, my patients say I don't talk enough. So, I need to work on talking more. Confucius said, "Glib talkers tend to lack integrity. Laconic people usually have more integrity." People talk about nothing important. It may be one way to cope with stress. Yet, more often people hurt each other by inconsiderate talk. A sharp tongue can stab people. I myself lost friends through my insensitive words. Loveless words are very harmful. Moku-moku is associated with honesty also. I cherish honesty more than any other virtue.

飄々 (Hyoh-hyoh) suggests lightness (not heaviness), cheerfulness, humor, etc. It literally means "fluttering." The lightness has a risk of being blown away. Tora-san is a good example of this. Since the Masculine is rooted in Heaven, as we say "Heavenly Father," men are essentially drifters. Since the Feminine is rooted in Earth, as we say "Mother Earth," women may find men precarious! People of hyoh-hyoh never lose their sense of humor, even in darkest times, because they don't take things too seriously. Thus they skip hard times. Hyoh-hyoh comes with boldness and courage. There is a saying, "Life depends on where you put your mind." We sense flexibility from this word. A flexible mind allows you to interpret life in the most positive way. The essence of hyoh-hyoh is lightness (not being heavy) and brightness. There is one word that means both, which happens to be in English. I doff my hat to this great English word "light."

ニコニコ (Niko-niko) could be the most important of all. I admire people who smile all the time. I used to believe they did not think much. Little did I know that they were truly great people. They are either in super good health or very considerate to others. We smile naturally, without any reason, when we are in very good health. That is why children in general are always smiling. If people smile even though they are not so healthy, that is due to their consideration of others. They do not want to make other people feel bad. No one wants to see a grim face. We say, "A smiling face has no enemy." Smiling brings on kindness and lovingness. When I see myself in the mirror, I look so serious. I need to practice smiling more. Lincoln has been credited with saying, "After 40, every man is responsible for his own face." Even though we do not detect it in his photos, I am certain he smiled easily. Confucius also said something similar: "At 40, I became free of hesitation." I suppose when one is certain about his conduct he has more room to relax, which will bring out the smile on his face. My ultimate sensei George Ohsawa claimed "smiling"

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Calmy
20 years old,
Not too seriously,
to be a man.

as one of the seven conditions of health. According to him, if one is healthy one should always smile without effort. By trying to smile all the time, one can improve their health.

Reciting "Tan-tan, moku-moku, hyoh-hyoh, niko-niko" many times is *Kototama* healing by itself, but it can be used as a mantra. 空海 (Kuukai – the founder of Shingon esoteric Buddhism) said, "Performing three mystic practices at the same time is the fastest way to attain Buddhahood." Three mystic practices are thinking of Buddha in your heart, chanting a mantra, and making a mudra (symbolic gestures with fingers). The modern interpretation would be: chanting tan-tan, moku-moku, hyoh-hyoh, niko-niko as a mantra; at the same time, imaging whatever this mantra brings to your mind; and swinging your arms back and forth. This can be a type of qi-gong that will bring you health and happiness.

Note

1. Tora-san, a famous movie character, is an extremely optimistic, likeable, yet very irresponsible drifter.

Takamatsu Bunzo was born in 1956. He graduated from the Kototama Institute in 1983 and from the University of Texas at Dallas in 2005. He has a practice in Dallas.