

What I Can Say For Sure

by *Bunzo Takamatsu*

I get questions like: “Will the stenosis get better?” from a patient who came in with a report that shows spinal stenosis. Or, “Will the cartilage grow back?” from a patient with knee pain who was told it was “bone on bone” and that surgery was recommended. I don’t know if the stenosis itself will get better or if the cartilage will regrow. However, I do know that some patients who had the same kinds of problems got better and have been functioning normally. They are “healed” in a sense. Or at least they are as good as “healed.” I am more interested in their quality of life than in the results of tests or reports.

The same thing can be said about more serious problems like cancer. I think we need to re-define “cured.” You are “cured” when you are able to completely forget about the problem. This never happens when you rely on test results. Even if you are told you are cancer free, it only means that you may be okay until the next test. It is a temporary guarantee. Usually you get anxious before the next test. Even if the result is good, somewhere in your mind there is some doubt. Whether it is the test result or the words of a respectable doctor, as long as you rely on their judgement you are never worry free. On the contrary, if you are completely oblivious of the disease and living a full life with much happiness, you are truly “cured.” It is important to have your own index or barometer. I am not telling you to ignore the test results or what your doctors say. They are important. They are important as they serve as a reference, but do not base your judgement on them alone. You should be the ultimate judge. In order to become your own judge, you should prioritize what’s important to you. Give good thought to what you really want to do in this life, what you really are, what death is, and work for your own answers. That way you will not vacillate when you need to make an important decision.

People often cannot decide what treatment is best for them. Without a doubt, Western medicine is mainstream and the first choice for most people. One of the reasons why it is the first choice is that people think Western medicine is scientific. You should know it is not as scientific as you think, or as it wants you to think. If you experiment on the same condition, you always get the same result. That is science. In medicine, this is impossible. The phenomena of the placebo effects itself demonstrates that it cannot be science as we think of it. After seeing various patients over 40 years I

can say one thing for sure: everyone is different. What worked on one person doesn’t necessarily mean it will work for the next person. There is no rule that can be applied to everyone.

Western medicine is heroic and dramatic because it is basically emergency medicine. It shines the most in life and death situations. Treating chronic problems is not its forte. You don’t use a big butcher’s knife to cut a small apple. Find the most appropriate method for you. There are so many types of treatments besides Western medicine. The existence of so many treatments is proof that Western medicine is not omnipotent. There are acupuncture, chiropractic, herbs, shiatsu, reflexology, reiki, all sorts of supplements, all sorts of diets, etc. In diets alone, there are macrobiotics, paleo, ketogenic, just to name a few. It is easy to get confused. There is one thing I can say for sure: “Any treatment works for someone. No treatment works for everyone.” Therefore, when you are in doubt of one kind of treatment, try it anyway. Whatever it is, you should be able to tell within a week if it is or is not for you. Either way, I don’t think it will kill you. No one has the right answer. If someone says he/she has the right answer, he/she is either pretending to know it, a fool, or a genius. Even “death” is not necessarily the wrong answer because no one knows what death really means.

Oriental medicine is a “stable” medicine. It has not changed much for several thousand years. Specialization has not occurred to it because

it is basically a wholistic medicine. It doesn’t even divide the mind from the body. Mind and body are two different forms of the same energy. Whether it is insomnia or depression, it is due to the imbalance of ki. The goal of treatment is balancing ki, and it can be done by acupuncture, moxibustion, kampo (Chinese herbs), or a special diet. I can say one thing for sure about problems of the mind. It always starts with an SD or “serious disease.” The symptom of an SD is you take things or yourself too seriously. You have to take a step aside and see yourself objectively. (By the way, this is the essence of meditation.) It is as if you would take a video of yourself and watch it on TV as you would watch youtube. As the famous comic Charlie Chaplin said, “Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot.” It’s not prozac that works best for depression, it is laughter. If you haven’t laughed for a while, watch out! You may have an SD.

One more thing I can say for sure is, as Sri Yukteswar (Paramahansa Yogananda’s guru) said, “Human conduct is ever unreliable until man is anchored in the Divine.” Now, the question is how to get anchored in the Divine, and that is my current homework.

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