TCM Philosophy and Theory

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is based on the observation of nature and natural phenomena. TCM views humans as a microcosm of the universe that surrounds them. Humans, and all life forms, are seen as inseparable from the nature. Humans represent the juncture between the cosmos and the earth, a fusion of cosmic and terrestrial forces. Sustained by the power of earth and transformed by the power of the cosmos, humanity cannot be separated from the nature.

As all things are seen as being interconnected, TCM postulates that what is good for nature is good for humanity, what is good for the mind is good for the body, and so on. To harm a part is to harm the whole; what is bad for the heart is bad for the body: nothing exists in isolation. This philosophy also implies that what harms one person damages all people and what injures the earth injures us all. TCM practitioners are practitioners of the "vitalist doctrine", which states that "man assists, but nature heals"; as opposed to the "doctrine of specific cause", which postulates that a single micro-organism could produce specific symptoms in healthy organisms.

Whereas Western medicine takes a structural view of the human system, TCM emphasizes a functional approach. The traditional Oriental view of human physiology is based on a concept of energy fields, a view comparable to the modern concept of an energy field that has arisen in contemporary physics. According to this idea, matter and energy are inseparable, dependent on each other and defined by each other. The separation of matter and energy, inner and outer, physical and mental is not realistic, as they are the same phenomena viewed from different perspectives. We use these opposing concepts merely to enable us to conceptualize the dynamic interplay, or cosmic dance, constantly going on around and within us, and with which we are intricately involved.

This "functional" approach of TCM is very different from Western allopathic medicine's "structural" view of health and disease. In allopathic medicine, disease is something alien to the person, something that must be killed or removed (the "doctrine of specific cause"). Western treatment tends to be geared towards treating a specific ailing organ or fighting an alien invasion. "Health" is then the absence of disease: in a simplistic manner, disease is only recognized when an outside pathogen invades the organism, or when there is structural damage to an organ: very little consideration is given to the lowered immune system that allowed the pathogen to invade, or the years of deterioration of the organ before structural damage was evident.

The functional approach of TCM views life as a dynamic process involving the interaction of forces and energies both within and outside the individual. These external forces are the climate, pathogenic factors, and the total environment outside our body. Internal factors include our genetic background, constitution, and our emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects.

TCM views well-being as a dynamic balance between these internal and external forces. Health is seen as the ability of an organism to respond appropriately to a wide variety of challenges in a way that insures maintaining equilibrium and balance. An imbalance may cause a disharmony in the system and, unless corrected, may eventually lead to a disease. "Disease" represents a failure of the organism to adapt to a challenge, a disruption of the overall equilibrium. The goal of
TCM is to maintain this balance, or to assist the individual to return to a state of dynamic balance, enabling him or her to achieve their optimal level of well-being. This state of well-being differs for everyone, and differs for everyone at different stages of life: even in the grips of terminal disease, there is a state of well-being that you can attain.

As a microcosm of nature, a cosmos in miniature, we are propelled by the same forces that are found in nature and follow the same cyclical patterns and processes. According to the ancient Chinese art of practical ecology, known as Feng Shui, the earth has veins of energy that course through it, hold it together, and act as a grid from which all life derives its power. In a similar manner, all living beings have a grid, the meridians, through which life energy (Qi) flows. These meridians, or energy grids, also contain points on them that affect the meridians. Many of these acupressure points are located in areas that are particularly difficult for Qi to pass through. Acupuncture points also have specific energetic functions that affect specific organ meridians or the system as a whole.

Asian bodywork therapy, acupuncture, and Chinese herbal medicine use this meridian system and the corresponding acupuncture points to communicate with the innate healing abilities of the living organism. The goal of all Oriental therapies is to return the individual to a state of dynamic balance, enabling him or her to achieve their optimal level of well being.

Reference