

The benefits and pitfalls of the *nature* of herbalists vs. body-therapists

“The art of medicine consists in amusing the patient while nature effects the cure”
- Voltaire

In ancient medicine there are clear differences in the natures of different people using the tools of treatment. Broadly, these are therapies which are either about the practitioner connecting to the patient, or therapies that are about a practitioner providing a facility to access nature through ingestion of substances. Usually the former is about the nature of the practitioner and the other is about the nature of the substances and in this case to some extent the practitioner is out of the picture. So this is a very interesting difference.

Fundamentally the nature of medicine overall is the domain of the yin, it is those people who are yin by-nature who can practise. The yang type people find the situation of being a therapist too narrow for their natural expression, they need bigger arenas than the inside of a practice, therefore their nature can often be like a bull in a china-shop if they are involved in medicine. It is clear that some people are healers by-nature and their nature is yin. These people form the basis of what is spoken about here and also the basis of the ancient and indigenous tribal understanding throughout history. Within this, the external-based therapies or body-therapies are more the energetic quality of yin/fire, as they require the intimate participation of a practitioner, and the internal-based therapies are those that use the addition of substances to the body, such as the herbalist, which can be described as more yang/water. These types are involved, but are by-nature less involving of the body itself.

The natures of these two different types of people are quite clear to those who have seen these practitioners in action. The body-therapist type of healer is usually a person who really likes to engage with people. Their mannerisms are warm, relaxed and affectionate, they don't have any particular attachment to hierarchy or about “knowing” stuff, and generally they seem comfortable and at-ease talking and interacting with people socially. These type of people make for very natural body-therapists.

However, the nature of the herbalist is quite different, more akin in mannerisms to the detachment of a surgeon! They tend to have a cool, clinical manner, and don't get overly engaged or “chatty” with a patient. They are not usually seen as a “people person”, they see things from a bit further away preferring not to engage completely. Knowledge is usually highly prized, they want to do their job with the utmost clarity. In both cases there is a foundation in the yin - the body therapist is yin within yin and the herbalist is yang within yin.

However, the disparate natures of these two types have many problems attached due to the human-condition of “self”:

The problem of the body-therapist is very much to do with “self”, so whatever processes and difficulties they may have, these will to some degree be transferred to the patient. So any hierarchical, domineering or aggressive notions about power and control they may have will affect the patient and eventually the treatment, which is another reason why yang energy expressions are not so useful especially in body-

treatment type therapy and they can sometimes do better as herbalists. Any kind of direction imposed by the personal experiences and ideologies of the practitioner will always come out, all the judgments, hopes and dreams become part of the treatment and therefore unless the practitioner is deeply relaxed and by-nature doing what they are doing for *no-reason at all*, just being what they are, then it will all be projected in treatment.

The process of being a healer is not a choice. Even if one tries to force the issue and “become” a healer and believes that “it isn’t a choice”, this will result in internal or external expressions of tension and this will show itself in the end. It cannot be “worked on” either, because the ideology of “getting better” is again a self-imposed motivation to “get better”, something again that will make the patient “aspire”. All this is human idealism and altruism, power, control even being liked or needed, all completely to do with the ideology of “me” or essentially the dis-ease itself. This is an expression of the controlling ideology of the fear of the impersonal and the want for everything to be very personal and about the practitioner. Even though one of their own mantras can be: “rule one: the patient is always first”, in fact it is all about all about the practitioner rather than the patient, no matter what the ideology.

However if there is a natural connection of human-energy to human-energy in treatment, this is potentially stronger than any other influence in the way of there being a domino-effect of the collapse of “me” which can occur when the patient who is in deep sufferance connects to the practitioner and at the point of contact there is a sense of no-separateness which resolves sufferance in the patient and the practitioner together. The practitioner isn’t more powerful or better, usually with a natural-practitioner there is a relaxation in expressing what they do naturally which means there is less resistance and more possibility of healing-energy just flowing. As a kind of absolute sense of healing, there can be a total dissolving of the “me”, because there is an interaction with a believed “me” of the patient, and a situation of natural-human of the practitioner, i.e. that which is without “me”. This is very rare, but in fact any interaction can effect a resolution in this way, even when having nothing to do with treatment. Please see Tony Parsons (<http://www.theopensecret.com>). Still, healing occurs despite the practitioner “me” getting in the way, although very often if there is a lot of “me” then there is transference or resonance with the dis-ease state in the patient and so tension is transferable just as openness can sometimes be. To some degree when the impersonal nature of things is accepted, then there can be freedom from the known arena of “me” as the practitioner.

If we look at the herbalist’s issues, there can be a total detachment from the patient and as a result a feeling of separation. Separation in itself is the fundamental cause of dis-ease, the patient can feel they are objectified and not interacted with at the same level. It is much far easier for the patient to believe in the power of the practitioner, or make the practitioner into a deity who holds all the answers. The practitioner can become very mind-based due to the fact that there is a process of memorising herbal properties, devising formulae and balancing prescriptions. This can form an intellectual snobbery about the power of thought and mind that the practitioner holds and thereby believes they are the “source of all knowledge.” The true nature of a herbalist is very much like that of a cook who senses all of the ingredients and far less “mind” is involved in this process than the one above.

This problem of objectification also occurs in situations that are off the body and mind-orientated such as psychotherapeutic counselling or guidance, or wherever language and thought become the basis of treatment, or in surgery where it is believed the patient is not being interacted with as they are under anesthetic! This environment of detachment makes for a cooler interaction and can increase the patient's problem of not being connected to, or their ability to feel connected to the prescribed herbs so they have limited effect. The practitioner can seem to be all in the head and not in the body, they can feel detached and cool, which stems from their fear of the intimate, of truly interacting and letting go of the detachment in order to be with the patient and part of the healing process.

However, although they are prescribed and augmented by the practitioner, herbs are useful in that they are neutral in and of themselves, purely natural and without "self", they have an objectivity which the practitioner doesn't. The actual nature and properties of the herbs have no intention, there is just a natural openness and a connection to the body, so in a way the practitioner is only a go-between for the herbs' effect on the patient. If the herbalist is less aloof and more intimately connected to the patient-energy, less "me" involved in detachment, then the connection with the practitioner actually boosts the effect of the herbs in a much stronger way as the human-to-human affinity is the most vital component of not feeling separate. But even without this, the power of the medicine and the connection with herbs has an effect all on its own within the body and is essentially the guiding energy of the herbal treatment, so the use of herbs may be appropriate as they can affect the nature of the patient directly bypassing the nature of the middle man/woman, i.e. the practitioner.

Of course herbs and body therapies are all used for different purposes, there isn't one tool that fits all, although tools can of course be used to treat any number of situations. There are two options for the potential therapist, one is to focus on one tool and use it very effectively in many different situations, or to know about many tools and use them appropriately if and when needed. Neither is better or worse, it just depends on the nature of the practitioner.

So in summary, the herb itself is relatively yin by nature because it is neutral and soft, but the practitioner using them tends to be more yang and so can tend towards detachment issues, forming a cooler "self". The body-therapy in itself is more yang because it is the energy through the practitioner's body which is human and so energetic and yang by nature. But the body-therapist practitioner is more yin, less heady and more bodily/intimately-connected. They have a tendency to form a heated "self" which can be about controlling the nature of the patient in relation to themselves, and so obscure natural healing energy.

There is no better or worse in this, no good or bad, this is just a description of the complex nature of the different types of tools of treatment, all using the same fundamental principles, and treating different patients, and the difficulties or augmentations of the human energetics due to the "self" in its different forms, getting in the way of natural connection.

David Nassim
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