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Treating the Mind and Body as Equals

▪ **Culture:** The ancient Asian art of *ki* uses acupuncture to transmit a 'healing force.' Some people swear by its powers to cure what ails you.

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Seoul - "You're in terrible shape. This may be painful."

Lee Sang Jin, a South Korean master of the ancient healing art of chi, known to Koreans as *ki*, was about to take on what no Western doctor had been able to cure: 18 months of chronic fatigue.

Despite near-perfect health all my life, I had been hit with constant exhaustion in the spring of 1991. I would sleep 12 hours, wake up tired and feel ready to collapse by 3 p.m. I began to lose weight and the color from my cheeks.

Then, to make matters worse, I got jaundice. A medical check in Los Angeles found that my liver was inflamed and malfunctioning. I was told to rest-and I began to work as many half-days as possible before being transferred to The Times' Tokyo Bureau in July that year.

Now, 1 1/2 years later, here I was in South Korea. The liver problems had cleared up, but I was still constantly tired. And facing me at the Chun Do Sun Bop Training Institute was a man who proposed to cure me in three visits flat.

As we sipped ginseng tea, Lee explained that he would replenish my body's energy flow by transmitting his own "healing force" through acupuncture. That flow was severely clogged as a result of stress, he said, diminishing my body's natural ability to heal itself. He said the body contained 84,000 holes through which the *ki*, or life force, flows in and out, but mine were blocked and my whole energy system was out of whack.

Ki holes? Uh, 84,000 of them?

I couldn't quite fathom the idea of all of those holes or of them getting clogged up by something as ephemeral as emotions. Still, I do believe in a powerful link between mind and body. And I am intrigued by the Asian approach of healing the body as a whole, as opposed to the Western approach of treating the body as a collection of separate, ailing parts. (But I still use both

approaches, surrendering to penicillin when I can't shake a cold.)

So when Chi Jung Nam, The Times' research assistant in Seoul, excitedly called me one day about a *ki* master he had met, I asked him to arrange an appointment.

Besides, what did I have to lose?

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It was last December, and South Koreans were about to elect their first civilian president in three decades. I was there to cover the election for The Times, but in between the political rallies and interviews, Chi and I sneaked off to the Chun Do Sun Bop Institute.

We waited in Lee's office. In the next room, other students were busy practicing the *ki* techniques. Suddenly, Lee entered.

I had imagined an old, bearded man with flowing robes, but he was 47, with ruddy cheeks, dressed in a gray double-breasted suit and a bright, flowered tie. We shook hands; then he got down to business.

"All human beings are born with self-healing power," he said, "but that energy is spent as we grow up, for various reasons. All you need to do is recharge that battery to make you whole again and able to resist such modern diseases as chronic fatigue and AIDS.

"I am not giving you medicine to cure disease," he stressed. "What I can do is make you strong enough to fight disease with your own energy by enhancing your *ki*."

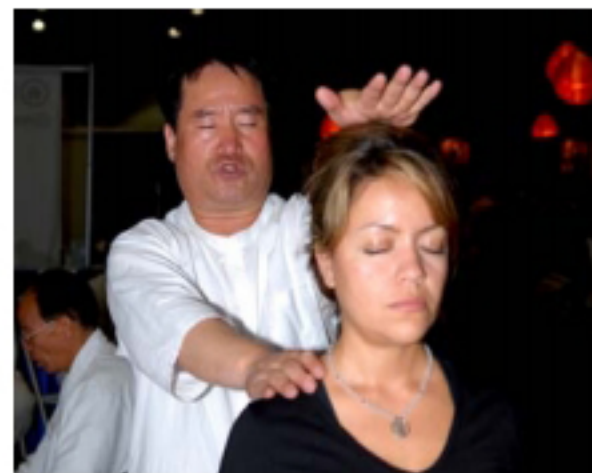
He motioned me to lie on a mat. Sitting cross-legged, he placed both hands on my stomach. Later, he explained he was "reading" my energy and putting it into his mind, like data into a computer, to analyze the problem.

Then he began to press the rim of my stomach with both hands. It was excruciatingly painful, and I fought the urge to cry out. I found myself involuntarily tensing my muscles to resist the pressure and protect myself from the pain. As he pressed, he exhaled loudly. He moved to my arms and legs, pressing and pinching; he sat me up and thumped my back. He squeezed my hands and laid his hands across my forehead and cheeks.

Then it was over.

Lee was sweating from the exertion. The process had taken just 10 minutes.

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As we replenished ourselves with water and fruit, he told me that my stomach and intestines were in "terrible shape." He said that many of the *ki* holes are concentrated in that area, and since mine were blocked, my body was not properly absorbing the nutrients I ate.

The second treatment lasted 20 minutes-with a discernible difference. The massaging hardly hurt this time. Visit No. 3 lasted only about 15 minutes and did not hurt at all.

Between the second and third visits, my body had already started reacting. I broke out in a fine red rash on my chin, which Lee said indicated the release of toxins from my system.

And-I was almost afraid to admit it-I seemed to have more energy. On Sunday, a day after the second treatment, I was so wired that I stayed up until 7 the next morning writing a story. I slept for two hours, then was out doing interviews at 10.

Now that it is April, I have not felt a trace of the old chronic fatigue. To be sure, I still get tired when I work long hours, but it is not the exhaustion I felt before.

I no longer feel the overwhelming need to take a midday nap. And my eyes pop open now between 6:30 and 7 every morning without an alarm. My color has improved, and I've gained back the weight I lost.

Aside from the *ki* treatment, nothing else had changed in my eating habits, exercise regimen or other health routines to account for the difference in the way I feel.

Had this mysterious man indeed opened up my *ki* "holes" and jolted me with some kind of mystical energy? Was there a more scientific answer-Lee's pressure on various blood vessels somehow reinvigorating my sluggish circulatory system?

Or was this simply a case of mind over matter-my mind wanting to believe I was healed, my body responding to that subliminal desire?

It almost didn't matter. For me, the point was that I felt completely healthy again for the first time in nearly two years.