



Integration of Herbs with Acupuncture

For those who practise acupuncture the integration of this treatment modality with herbal formulae can broaden the scope of the therapeutic range and allow for greater flexibility. The first thing that should be stressed is that, whilst in a few cases a herbal formula fits the patient's disharmony well and can therefore address the whole condition, in most cases of chronic diseases, it is unrealistic to expect a herbal formula to address the whole constellation of patterns of disharmony.

The condition of most patients with chronic diseases will manifest with at least two patterns, and often more. For example, it would not be unusual for a patient to suffer from Liver-Blood deficiency, Liver-Qi stagnation, Liver-Yang rising, Spleen-Qi deficiency and Dampness in the Middle Burner. Although two or even three formulae can be used in combination, it is sometimes preferable to integrate acupuncture with a herbal remedy. One can therefore use a herbal formula to address a certain pattern of disharmony and acupuncture to treat another.

The integration of acupuncture with herbal formulae is advantageous because it allows us to use one formula only and also because it simplifies the acupuncture protocol. Furthermore, the integration of acupuncture and herbal remedies works particularly well if we are clear about the diagnosis, the differentiation between Root (Ben) and Manifestation (Biao) and the treatment principle.

ROOT (BEN) AND MANIFESTATION (BIAO)

The Root is the disharmony that is the origin of the patient's symptoms and signs. The Manifestation is the complex of symptoms and signs stemming from the Root: the relationship between Root and Manifestation is very much like that between the root of a tree and its branches: the condition of the root (and the soil) determines the appearance of the branches. Treating the root of a tree improves the health of its branches: similarly, treating the Root of a disharmony automatically treats its Manifestation.

For example, if a patient suffers from shivers, acute occipital headache, a slight temperature, a stiff neck, a runny nose, sneezing and a Floating pulse, the Root is invasion of the Lung's Wei-Qi portion by Wind-Cold and all the symptoms are the Manifestation. It is not necessary to treat each individual symptom as treating the Root, i.e. expelling Wind-Cold and releasing the Exterior, will lead to the disappearance of the Manifestation.



If we are clear about the Root and Manifestation and the treatment principle to be adopted, we can then use acupuncture to treat the Root and a herbal remedy to treat the Manifestation or vice versa. For example, if a patient suffers from oedema of the ankles, with frequent-pale urination, backache, chilliness, a pale tongue and a deepweak pulse, the oedema is the Manifestation and Kidney-Yang deficiency is the Root.

If we are clear as to what is the Root and what is the Manifestation among the various clinical manifestations, we could use *Strengthen the Root* to treat the Root, i.e. tonify Kidney-Yang, and acupuncture to resolve oedema (with Ren-9 Shuifen, Ren-5 Shimen, SP-9 Yinlingquan, KI-7 Fuliu and BL-22 Sanjiaoshu). The opposite approach could also be taken, tonifying Kidney-Yang with acupuncture (with KI-7 Fuliu, KI-3 Taixi, BL-23 Shenshu, with moxa), and resolving oedema with a herbal remedy which may be *Wu Ling San* Five 'Ling' Powder or the **Three Treasures®** remedy *Separate Clear and Turbid*.

EXPELLING PATHOGENIC FACTORS VERSUS TONIFYING THE BODY'S QI

The Full and Empty character of the condition is also important and we can use acupuncture to deal with the Full condition (expelling pathogenic factors) and a herbal formula to tonify the body Qi or vice versa.

When I use herbal medicine only in a complex Full-Empty condition, I usually prefer to deal with the Fullness and Emptiness separately and I often start by expelling pathogenic factors first. For example, in a case of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome with deficiency of Spleen-Qi and pronounced Dampness, I would most probably start with a formula that drains Dampness such as *Drain Fields* and I would not give a tonic formula: this approach is especially recommended ended if the tongue and pulse indicate a Full condition: in the example above, the tongue would be swollen and with a sticky coating and the pulse would be full and slippery.

I prefer this approach, i.e. expelling pathogenic factors first, because I feel that herbal tonics cannot work well when the body is encumbered by pathogenic factors, especially if these are Dampness or Phlegm. Obviously, the formula that expels pathogenic factors should be followed eventually by one that tonifies the body's Qi, in the above example *Tonify Qi* and *Ease the Muscles* to tonify Spleen-Qi.

Acupuncture works in a different way from herbal medicine as it does not introduce any substance in the body and has a more self-regulating and self-balancing effect: for example, if we needle Ren-12 Zhongwan, this will tonify the Spleen and resolve Dampness, whereas if we use *Huang Lian Rhizoma Coptidis* this will only dry Dampness and not tonify the Spleen. Indeed, if we used it for a long time, its bitter-cold energy might injure the Spleen.



Thus, because of this self-balancing character of acupuncture, we can often use a herbal formula to expel pathogenic factors and acupuncture to tonify the body's Qi. For example, if a patient suffers from stasis of Blood deriving from internal Cold and Yang deficiency, we could use *Stir Field of Elixir* to invigorate Blood and eliminate stasis and acupuncture to tonify Kidney-Yang and expel Cold (with Ren-6 Qihai, KI-3 Taixi, BL- 23 Shenshu, with moxa); alternatively, we could use acupuncture to invigorate Blood (with SP-10 Xuehai, BL-17 Geshu and ST-29 Guilai) and the formula *Strengthen the Root* to tonify and warm Kidney-Yang.

LOCAL PROBLEMS

The use of a herbal formula often 'frees' the acupuncture which can become simpler and more focused on a specific problem. For example, if a patient suffers from eczema that is very localized in a specific area, e.g. around the scalp, we can use a formula such as *Clear Lustre* to cool Blood in general; by doing this, the acupuncture is freed from the necessity of clearing Heat and cooling Blood in general and can be more focused on the specific area affected with the use of local points. This also allows us to reduce the number of points used.

Another example could be that of a patient with eye problems deriving from Liver- Blood deficiency. By using a formula to nourish Blood such as *Brighten the Eyes*, the acupuncture can be focused on treating the local points around the eyes. Yet another example could be that of a patient suffering from Bi Syndrome of one joint only, occurring against a background of Liver-Blood deficiency; in such a case we could prescribe *Brocade Sinews* to nourish Liver-Blood and expel Wind-Damp and use acupuncture simply to treat the affected joint.

ACUPUNCTURE TO COUNTERACT POSSIBLE SIDE-EFFECTS

This is an important use of acupuncture in conjunction with herbal formulae. If we need to use a herbal formula that might have undesirable side-effects, we can use acupuncture to counteract them. For example, if a patient suffers from pronounced Yin deficiency we would prescribe *Nourish the Root*®: a pronounced Yin deficiency will necessarily take a long time to treat and if the patient also suffers from a Spleen deficiency (which is very likely) the cloying effect of the Yin tonics may injure the Spleen in the long run.

Thus, an acupuncturist can dedicate his or her attention to supporting the Spleen (with Ren-12 Zhongwan, ST-36 Zusanli and SP-6 Sanyinjiao) while the patient is taking the Yin tonic. Another example could be that of a patient needing a formula to tonify and warm Yang (such as *Strengthen the Root*): hot herbs may damage Yin when used for a long time. An acupuncturist can therefore use acupuncture to support the Yin, by tonifying Ren-4 Guanyuan, KI-6 Zhaohai and KI-3 Taixi.