

Summary: Osteopath's view on your health and what can be done to maintain it.

The Resolution of Conflict: an osteopathic perspective

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Most of us are very familiar with conflict. It arises somewhere during the course of our day, usually only moments after awakening. Oftentimes it involves the very act of getting out of bed itself. After all, getting out of bed is often done earlier than one would like but is necessitated by the need to earn an income or raise a family. From there on our day unfolds as a series of struggles. Many arise from the stresses of modern living. Commuting to work can be frustrating when it involves traffic and construction delays. Work itself can be a source of conflict if we're unhappy about the nature or circumstances of it. And of course, most of our conflict arises from our interactions with other people: from our superiors, co-workers and clerks, to the family members that we deal with on a daily basis.

Though many of our struggles and sources of conflict appear small and insignificant, the result of living in this way is cumulative and has consequences. The body is forced to live in a state of heightened stimulation. We get angry, feel anxious or upset and our muscles tense, our heart rate increases, our breathing becomes shallow, etc. The sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, responsible for the so-called "fight-or-flight" response, predominates. Though a useful response for getting out of danger, this branch becomes overused from the self-imposed mental and emotional regrets, worries and fears that result from conflict. Physical deterioration results from an imbalanced nervous system, from the stress and anxiety that are the outcome of a conflicted life. Having 'fought or fled' our way through the day, we wind up without much energy by the end of the day and exhausted by the end of our lives.

Not surprisingly, mainstream medicine embraces the idea of conflict in its approach to care. Physicians are taught to view illness as the enemy, as a battle being waged between our bodies and a foreign invader. Though Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, admonished "honor the healing power of nature" and "do no harm," modern medicine is all too eager to intervene and treat the body as merely the battleground which receives the arsenal of weapons launched at the enemy. Pharmaceutical drugs, the weapon of choice, are inherent with their own conflict, that being their desired specific result with their undesirable generalized toxic side effects. Though certainly modern medicine has its role, perhaps there is also a larger role for healthcare without conflict, for a system of healing that is not based on fear and that supports the body while engaging the Universal Wisdom.

Osteopathy is one such system. Perhaps it is without conflict because it was not man-made. Dr. Andrew Taylor Still, the founder, did not claim to have invented osteopathy. He stated, "No human hand framed its laws; I ask no greater honor than to have discovered it." Dr. Still, an M.D., surgeon and Civil War officer, after suffering through the death of three of his children to illness, desired to embrace a system of healing without conflict, a system with a completely different approach. He believed that "To find health should be the object of the doctor. Anyone can find disease." The search for health involved two things. First, it involved the return to order within the human body by the removal of impairment or obstructions. As Dr. Still declared, "... order and health are inseparable, and that when order in all parts is found, disease cannot prevail ..." Second, it involved allowing Nature to do the rest because, as Dr. Still stated, "Nature has been thoughtful enough to place in man everything that the word 'remedy' means." An osteopathic treatment, therefore, would seek to balance the impaired nervous system that results from a life of conflict and then allow the inherent ability of the body to repair the damage that has been done. It would not, in other words, view that damage, like neck pain and headaches, for example, as a foreign enemy and merely prescribe powerful medications for it.

Osteopaths also understand that a physical structure, like the highly evolved nervous system, is only one aspect of a complex being that Dr. Still described as 'triune,' composed of "... the material body ... the spiritual being ... a being of mind ..." The goal of a treatment, therefore, is the restoration of harmony from the imbalances that affect our lives on every level. It is within this setting that an osteopathic treatment takes place.

To treat in such a way, to search for health without conflict, requires a whole new perspective. The osteopath places his or her hands on the patient and immediately senses "the whole." This is accomplished by staying present and attentive while not focusing on the parts. The hands remain passive, the mind silent, the spirit accepting, not judging. It is only then that information is obtained. The interface between the whole body and the lesion, between the health and the illness, can only be sensed in the present moment. One cannot arrive there with preconceived ideas or thoughts about the process. To do so would conflict with a momentary ever-changing process, and would therefore interrupt the ability to participate and effect change. Instead, we wait patiently while a biodynamic process slowly emerges and engages in a never-ending healing process, a renewal of life at every moment, which requires absolute attention to the moment to participate in. The embryo recreating itself, carrying out its plan of healing along the lines determined by the priorities within, and that inherently contain no conflict. The osteopath is the fulcrum, the catalyst, the observer. Dr. Still observed this process and it prompted him to declare that he saw god in the faces and forms of all his patients.

There is a 'gap' that exists between this present moment as it is and all of our thoughts about how it should be, how we would like it to be, or how we hope it will be. This gap is the source of conflict itself and creates confusion and fear. It leads to the stress and anxiety that occupies our lives, creates imbalances, and consumes our vital energy. It is the healer's job to erase this gap by participating in the moment as it continually unfolds, without conditions or expectations. It is the job for all of us if we are to end conflict, heal ourselves, and heal those around us.