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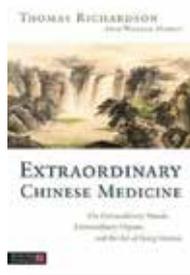
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# The art of being Human

**By Thomas Richardson**

*Wherever the art of Medicine is loved, there is also a love of Humanity.*

– Hippocrates

**I**N BECOMING AN individuated being at the level of humanity, one is “taking on the burden of being human”. What is the burden of being human? It is the burden of connecting Heaven and Earth and expressing love at the level of humanity. For this reason, a closely related Chinese word of the character *ren* (任) (as in the *ren mai*, which etymologically connotes taking on the burden of being human) is *ren* (仁), which is composed of the radical for person with the number “2”. While this character is often translated as benevolence, etymologically it is related to expressing care from one person to another, or between two people. Confucius stated that it could be defined as *ai* (愛)—love. Another etymological interpretation of it is that it is the result of an individual person connecting Heaven and Earth.

This suggests that the highest expression of being human is to express love—as embodied wisdom and compassion—at the level of humanity. In so doing, one becomes an emperor—one who connects Heaven and Earth with all of humanity. This is the art of being human—to connect above and

below and the inside and the outside, and to experience and express one’s humanity is, ultimately, the motive force underlying love, compassion and wisdom. Love is the highest external manifestation of internal being, and the route that becomes the deepest way in which the external can be experienced internally. This is our natural state as human beings, something that we all have access to, at all times. When one is not in this state, or when one is further from this state, it indicates the presence of blockages within the meridian system that are preventing the full interpenetration of yin and yang at the level of humanity.

Thus, the primary work we have as humans is to connect Heaven and Earth, and the natural outcome of such a connection is to express love or benevolence between self and other. This is, ultimately, the primary work—the primary “burden”—that we have as incarnated beings at the level of humanity, as well as the means to cultivate and express our humanity. As stated by Han Yu (768-824), “Universal love is called humanity. To practise this in the proper manner is called righteousness. To proceed according to these is called the Tao” (as cited in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Wing-Tsit Chan, 1963, p. 454). It is not that we need to cultivate humanity because it is “good” or because we “should”; being in touch with suffering—our own as well as that of others—is the only way to become whole within ourselves, to become more fully human and accomplish what we are here for. Cultivating

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*The Lantern* is a journal of Chinese medicine and its related fields with an emphasis on the traditional view and its relevance to clinic. Our aim is to encourage access to the vast resources in this tradition of preserving and restoring health, whether via translations of works of past centuries or observations from our own generation working with these techniques. The techniques are many, but the traditional perspective of the human as an integral part, indeed a reflection, of the social, meteorological and cosmic matrix remains one. We wish to foster that view.

humanity entails cultivating humility, presence and compassion; in care giving, we come face-to-face with suffering, with the pain of others, and are thus given an incredible opportunity to cultivate humanity—our own as well as that of our patients.

Humanity occurs at the level of the heart; the heart is the human-level reality, centred between Heaven and Earth. To be fully human is to be conscious of and to realise one's connectedness to everything and everyone else, and to make decisions and take action based on the reality of each moment and not on pre-conditioned values or realities. As stated by David Frawley and Vasant Lad, "True humanity, which is humane feeling for all life, is at the heart of all life... It is only when we come to look upon all things as human that we are capable of a truly humane existence" (*The Yoga of Herbs: an Ayurvedic Guide to Herbal Medicine*, 1986, p. 3).

Residing at the pivot of any yin-yang polarity gives rise to the moment of experiential awareness. Therefore, to be "centred within oneself" is to be residing at the pivot between upper and lower, inside and outside, body and spirit, yin and yang. All of the pivots within the body relate—energetically, functionally, and spatially—to the ability to be fully, experientially present in the moment. For it is at the pivot of any given duality that one has the opportunity to transcend duality—which includes the dualities of vertical and horizontal, self and other, and space and time. The *chong mai* is the pivot between *ren mai* and *du mai*, as well as pre-heaven and post-heaven; the middle *dantian* is the pivot between the upper and lower *dantian*; the individuated human is a pivot between Heaven and Earth and the inside and the outside.

Pre-heaven qi comes from the stored essence and provides the basis for experiencing at the level of humanity; post-heaven qi comes from digesting that which we consume/experience. Heaven lies between these two; therefore, Heaven is the moment of experiential awareness. The act of consciously experiencing allows one to reside at the pivot, which allows one to reside in Heaven—i.e. a state of unity. In digesting one's experiences, one generates post-heaven qi. The more an individual allows themselves to fully experience each moment, the greater the efficiency with which each experience will produce post-heaven qi, and the more energy/vitality will grow. The greater

the production of post-heaven qi, the easier it becomes to replenish and store up pre-heaven qi. After experiencing and producing post-heaven qi, the reverse alchemical process occurs as this is brought down, condensed, and converted to essence—which then becomes pre-heaven qi for future experiential moments. For this reason, it can be suggested that the act of consciously experiencing produces qi and essence, and occurs when one is in—as well as causes one to be in—the natural state.

The natural state is our birthright, as well as what we are here for. It is through moving closer to the natural state that we actualise our destiny. However, simply because we all have the natural state within us, does not mean that we actualise it all the time. We all have struggles, trauma, and blockages simply from being human and living a human life on earth, and these challenges will often pull us out of our experiential awareness of the natural state. The key, however, is to recognise that all of these are simply obscurations that cover over the brilliance of our true beauty; the natural state is always there within, waiting for us to recognise it.

The practice of medicine is always based on an underlying cosmology, a perspective on humanity, who we are, and what we are here for. The model put forth in *Extraordinary Chinese Medicine* demonstrates that, from the perspective of Daoism and Chinese medicine, every human being is inextricably linked to Heaven above and Earth below, and that we have access to this connection every single day at all times, through the extraordinary vessels and organs. Shifting our perspective has the ability to change how we practise the medicine. If we change our assumptions about reality, and the meaning of suffering, it will actually change how we interact with our patients, and it will change how we apply the therapeutic methods that we have at our disposal.

There is a continuum between medicine, healing and spirituality; part of the role of any practitioner of medicine is to understand how to manage the spectrum between healing and self-actualisation, between remedying physical maladies and encouraging spiritual growth. For this reason, the art of practising medicine is not merely to "fix" problems or discomforts, but to help our patients to become more whole in all senses, and thus to help them move closer to the natural state.

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■ This article is an extract from the conclusion of the recently released book *Extraordinary Chinese Medicine: The Extraordinary Vessels, Extraordinary Organs, and the Art of Being Human*, published by Singing Dragon.

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