

FLIP A COIN

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Every single time you flip a coin, it will come down either heads or tails. And every single time you flip a coin, the odds for how it lands are exactly the same: 50-50. It could be heads. It could be tails. And no matter how many times you flip that coin, every individual throw keeps the same odds. 50-50, heads or tails.

Not all things are determined by a previous chain of events. There are a million million coins flipping right now in your world—in your body—in your life.

There is instability, there is chaos, there is open chance built into the system. It begins on the atomic level and it works its way up from there.

What I am here to speak about is the flipping of coins; the welcome chaos, the open chance and instability of the universe; and how this allows free will to overcome determinism in the healing of body mind and spirit in Chinese Medicine.

When we flip a single coin, it is impossible to know if it will come down heads or tails. If we flip that same coin a million times, this will still be the case each time.

But if we flip a million coins all at the same time, it is very easy to predict that the whole mess is going to land about 50-50, heads and tails. The upshot of the matter is basically determined in advance.

The same is true of we take each of those individual coin flips, one coin flipping a million times, and average them out. The answer is basically predictable, a foregone conclusion: 50-50 heads and tails.

We live and function between these two realities all the time. A single coin flipping a million times, each flip completely unpredictable. A million coins flipping, together or averaged over a set period of time, with probability approaching certainty as to how it's going to turn out.

Your chair, for instance, according to both modern physics and ancient Taoism is (like yourself) moving rapidly in and out of existence. We are void, we return. We are void, we return. This is not new age wu wu; this is real. Your chair is going in and out of existence. You hope that it comes back into existence each time basically unchanged, but it doesn't have to. It's just a very high probability that those atoms, those molecules re-assemble in basically the same way from quantum moment to moment.

We like that; we highly value and appreciate this form of stability in inanimate objects; we want to be able to predict with near-enough certainty that the chair will still be there,

all those atomic and molecular coins flipping in unison, behaving in statistically unimaginative ways.

Statistical reality serves us very well in our material dealings with inanimate objects. The chair upon which you sit, the diamond ring on your finger; the market value of your Master's degree. We appreciate, we encourage, perhaps it might even be said that we crave this predictability.

And it is reasonable, when approaching the study of inanimate objects. I'm not here to challenge that. But I would like to *bend* it a little bit, as we remain in the realm of material reality, but enter the world of medicine--- which concerns itself with the material manifestation of living things.

Living things are more unpredictable than non-living things. This is our glory, our madness, our strength; we partake of chaos--- we certainly generate chaos—and in the midst of all the uncertainty that we both harbor and promote, we find freedom and health.

For living beings, stasis, in fact, is illness and finally death. Living systems are unstable; they are dynamic, achieving homeostasis NOT by remaining the same from moment to moment, but by allowing our instability to be the means by which the universe informs us of its intentions—and allows us to respond with free will.

Now what on earth do I mean by that—that our instability is the means by which the universe informs us of its intentions, and allows us to respond with free will.

I mean that it is through our freely flipping coins that we become sensitive and impressionable to the world around us, and aware of just how much choice we actually do have, in each new moment.

For example:

Have you ever seen a really high level Aikido master being attacked by five guys at once? It's an incredible sight, and if you haven't seen it I hope you get an opportunity. There he or she stands, at the center of the universe, with five guys jumping kicking flying right at him, and the next moment all five of those guys are flying AWAY again, in totally different directions than they were headed.

How in heck does that happen. It has everything to do with the awareness of one coin flipping over and over again in total indeterminate freedom, versus a million coins flipping, caught in an overwhelming probability wave.

Pare it down to now. Now is a moment. No past. No future. See if you can come with me to feel what I'm talking about; it takes guts. Being present now. Now is actually a pretty long time.

When we're living in the statistical trajectory, however, the moment goes by in a flash of past to future, hurtling forward through time. Now is so short; no time to make decisions; in fact when our awareness is spread out over so many moments, consciousness averaged out over a million flipping coins, taking time in big chunks of past present future, how much time or freedom is there for any given coin to do anything unpredictable, spontaneous or free?

On the other hand, if I am totally in the now, totally present now, NOTHING is happening. So anything can happen. And this is how the Aikido master is present, taking life one coin at a time.

Each moment is fully inhabited by awareness, and so there is more perception, the capacity to see more possibilities.

Each moment is free of the last moment, so there is no determinism; what I do now does not have to follow like a domino effect upon what was happening before.

And each moment, like the flipping coin, is sensitively unstable, open to influence—a butterfly flaps its wings in Guatemala, a truck goes over a bump in Texas—to the freely flipping coin, all things come to bear—potentially, the whole universe informs the freely flipping coin.

I am going to bring all of this back to the practice of Chinese medicine before too long, but first briefly let's explore each of those three aforementioned effects of being present, one at a time.

One, when each moment is fully inhabited by awareness, there is more perception, the capacity to see more possibilities. Many people have spoken of this, primarily in the fields of spiritual discipline and athletics, so in fact an Aikido master is a perfect blending of these two traditions of perception enhanced by presence.

When we **leave** the trajectory, **stop** averaging out consciousness over a million coin flips and just attend to the present moment, the texture of the universe changes. Not only does it feel as though time is moving more slowly, as though each moment is a larger space— spaces open up; furniture, bodies, even the walls don't seem as dense; we see or feel the empty spaces which in reality are truly there in the so-called solid material world—and the finer weave of the texture of what's in the spaces.

Imagine the difference in needling an acupuncture point from this space—in choosing an acupuncture point or herbal response from this place—the levels of diagnostic awareness open to us when we are here now, one coin at a time, open into vast levels of subtlety—and thus is the Aikido master or acupuncturist able to choose the intervention which is

now obvious, but which might easily have been glossed over in a less fully inhabited present moment.

Second, full presence frees this moment from the last moment, cancels local determinism; what I do now does not have to follow like a domino effect upon what was happening before.

A simple and familiar example of this shift is the act of taking a deep breath. Taking a deep breath is one tried and true method for becoming more fully present here and now. Caught in the passionate biochemical trajectory of body and spirit in the throes of any strong impulse—to hit or to run, to cringe or to argue with a traffic cop—take a deep breathe, and suddenly freedom returns.

I am not talking about something mysterious here. We do this—or fail to do this—all the time. Become more fully present by changing the way you breathe, and everything changes—suddenly there is space between cause and effect, and what follows cause is *not* effect but freedom. Reflex disappears. In terms of how you respond to that traffic cop, or any other situation that presents itself, all bets are suddenly off.

Here is just one way in which a simple biological shift shatters the foregone conclusions about what happens next. This is a big deal when five guys are attacking you. Or when you have liver disease. Or, I say, every moment of your life—but especially the moments when the local trajectory doesn't look so good.

To bring it back out of metaphor and return to medicine, here are these two ways of looking at things. In the one way of looking at things, there is total open chance. In the other, there is determinism.

Between these two realities, Western medicine's genius is working with biological determinism, with probability as it approaches certainty. It's good at looking at the million coins all flipping in unison, or averaging out the million flipping coins, and saying if this is what's happening now, within 5 years you'll be in Kidney failure. This is the trajectory, this is the probability that approaches certainty.

(This is also why the more time you spend predicting things, the more predictable things become.)

This is the genius of Western medicine, to look at this level, the level of the collective flipping of the coins. And it is very useful—that Aikido master for instance makes very good use of a quick statistical summary of his opponent's momentum as he comes flying through the air. Tuning in on the level of trajectory is very worthwhile; don't ignore it. On one level, this is reality, and this is Western medicine's genius.

It is not the only reality; it is not the only genius.

The particular genius of Chinese medicine is the moment of freedom, when things could go either way—the return to the single flip of the coin. Half of Chinese medicine is about provoking that return to freedom, and the other half is about creating a context for the client to choose the highest in that moment of freedom, and keep those moments of freedom coming.

All branches of Chinese Medicine; I'm not being partisan here. I'm talking about how sticking a needle in somebody's ankle could stop their hot flashes, clear a migraine, prevent them from going into anaphylactic shock from a bee sting. This is not premarin for the hot flashes, imatrex for the migraine, prednisone for the bee sting.

I am grateful for these pharmaceutical options; I have a deep respect for the intricacy and power of Western medicine—but that is not the kind of intervention that Chinese medicine offers. It isn't a prednisone, premarin or imatrex substitute; it's not about stopping a biological trajectory in motion by opposing, blocking or overruling it with a new trajectory.

Chinese medicine also seeks to disrupt an unhealthy stasis, destabilize a pathological trajectory, but not by replacing it with a new and improved deterministic process. It works—and I will speak later about the physical method by which it works—to allow the body in whole or part to say, What am I doing? WHAT am I doing? I'm yelling at my mother-in-law, I'm yelling at my kid, I'm about to pour another drink, I'm about to tell my neighbor to go to hell, I'm about to secrete something completely ridiculous and counterproductive in my endocrine system, which is going to cause a bunch of cells to mutate and my blood pressure to rise and.... What AM I doing?

This is a very good moment. The coin is in the air. It is flipping, it hasn't landed yet.

Which brings us to the third lesson from the Aikido master (remember him or her?).

That each moment, like the flipping coin, is sensitively unstable, open to influence—to the freely flipping coin, all things come to bear—potentially, the whole universe informs the freely flipping coin. When I say the freely flipping coin what I really mean is all things unstable, all things held in indeterminacy, in flux—all things that could go either way, depending on the prevailing influences of the surrounding field.

Let us speak of integrity and holism; and of bounded and unbounded fields. I swear this is going to get more recognizably Chinese pretty soon.

Any time we name or label, any time we set parameters, we create what is called a bounded field. Within a bounded field, averages can be calculated, probabilities assessed. The probability of a woman surviving breast cancer can be calculated but only within a bounded field. It could be the field of all women who've ever had breast cancer

on the planet, or just North American women in the last ten years, or women in Minnesota, or women with a history of smoking, or women with a strong sense of humor.

You've gotta have a bounded field in order to be able to make this kind of statistical assessment; but *how* you bound the field could raise or lower her life expectancy considerably. If you don't bound the field, just leave her wide open face to face with the universe, you're back to the single coin flipping. She either will or won't survive, and the variables are literally infinite.

For predictive purposes, the unbounded field is useless, so Western medical science doesn't consider it much. What is an example of an unbounded field? I can only give one, because there only is one: the Tao, or all creation. In an unbounded field, a single coin is flipping, and nothing less than **everything in creation** is going to determine how that coin lands. In an unbounded field, a woman has breast cancer. In an unbounded field, I stand here and look at you, making room for the whole universe to show up.

So what good is that, and what does it have to do with Chinese medicine. Let's find out right now together.

(totally wing it)

OK that was my introduction; now I can get down to talking directly about Chinese medicine, which will allow me to broach the subject of what it means to be a brand new practitioner of Chinese medicine, which **is** the subject of what is, after all, a commencement address.

Chinese medicine works through the principle of Gan Ying, or Resonance. Pretty much everything I know about Gan Ying I learned from Peter Eckman. If you want footnotes and exact textual references, drop me an email—right now doesn't seem like the time to get overly scholarly. Or if you read classical Chinese, check out the 6th chapter of a Han dynasty text called the *Huai Nan Zi*. Then please email me and tell me what else you learned.

The central metaphor for Resonance or Gan Ying in classical Chinese thought is that of a lute player who, by plucking the string of one lute, causes the corresponding string on another nearby lute to vibrate.

Many of us have seen this sort of thing happen; you lean your guitar against the speaker, you put on your favorite Bob Dylan album, and your guitar strings start humming, playing along with Bob. If you've never seen this happen take my word for it, this is one

of those verifiable phenomena. It goes on all the time and Western science acknowledges it, that vibration effects resonance between like and like.

From this comes all the classifications of material phenomena into categories of correspondence, i.e. winter is kidney is salty is black is bones. For those of you who are not practitioners, I'm sure that last sentence was gibberish. Let me say for all of you, what the Chinese have done is figure out a fabulous system of vibrational medicine, whereby we can pluck the strings of one lute, and make another lute's strings vibrate.

It goes a little further than this. Apparently, and this is a verifiable, accepted Western science fact as well as the foundation of Chinese Medicine, not only does like influence like, but **almost** like influences **almost** like, into becoming more like.

If you place two clocks next to each other, ticking slightly off-rhythm from each other, they will both adjust to come into rhythm with each other. If you have female roommates or close co-workers, their menstrual cycles begin to synchronize over time. They've done research with videotape of people coming together, making initial small talk, and at exactly the point when those two people's breathing and pulse rate come into syncopation, that is when the conversation between them drops from small talk into a deeper level of conversation. This is called the Law of Entrainment, and it has been much studied and verified, but never fully explained. It applies equally to both inanimate and living systems.

Entrainment—the tendency of like or almost-like things to come into resonance with each other—is another example of a way in which the field in which something happens really does matter, and another way in which wholeness or integrity forms, for better or for worse.

This is one aspect of how a disease can progress; healthy cells in the immediate vicinity of cancer cells are far more likely to turn cancerous than healthy cells surrounded by healthy cells. This how insane mobs form out of otherwise sane individuals; this is how your children become hooligans from hanging out with those other kids who stay late after school.

And this is how Chinese Medicine functions, too—by peer pressure. Seriously, Chinese Medicine functions according to the Law of Entrainment and the laws of Resonance. We use specific points and specific herbs to influence the body by sounding pure clear notes; and HOLDING THEM; so that the body can re-tune itself. We bring organs and systems back into tune, and into harmony.

But what are we bringing it into harmony WITH? Nature. The universe. Tao. This harmony—this integrity, to come back to that controversial word—is not solely *within* the individual.

To the Chinese, health can only be found in a much larger field than myself. The most powerful points on the body, called the Command Points, are found from the knees down

to the feet, from the elbows out to the hands-- specifically in the areas of our body where we have contact and interaction with the outside world.

My health is my ongoing openness and exchange with all creation; it is my ability to harmonize **not only** with the local conditions of my own endocrine system, or my landlord's latest invasion; it is my ability to be true to what is deepest in myself in the context of Tao, the context of all creation.

Does that sound like a tall order? Not for Chinese medicine. A new client walks into your local acupuncture office with a horrible migraine, three ulcers and a bad back. Oh yeah and he has insomnia and he want to lose weight. By tomorrow. What are you going to do about it?

First, you're going to evoke a controlled destabilization of the client's whole system. You're going to do everything you can to bring long-standing trajectories and prevailing statistical norms to a crashing halt. Here are patterns and processes with a lot of momentum behind them—maybe years and years of momentum. What's the probability of anything changing in *this* moment? Pretty high with a good treatment plan.

When illness is still young and unstable and full of possibility, all we need to do is sound the note of health, and by resonant response, coins freely flipping respond to the field change by coming back into harmony. Those are the easy cases. You *will* get some of those; hopefully many.

The tougher cases are really not that much tougher; they just need a little more time. With them there is more that is entrenched in the current integrity, and what's going to get them out of it is the experience of paradox, or what I call the art of confoundry.

The object of needling an acupuncture point is not to make the body stop doing something and make it do another thing. The goal is to destabilize a system that's locked in a trajectory, locked into believing a trajectory is real, even though its just statistically real.

The object of needling an acupuncture point is to make the body say, Huh!/? And become present, and choose the next action from a context much wider than the determinism of the local trajectory. The note chosen, the point chosen, the vibration chosen must be chosen artfully, because it is not a matter of force but a matter of resonance.

What is the intervention that will stop the trajectory of a specific disease process? What is the intervention that will stop the trajectory of a heroin addict? Not just anything will get through. Not just anything will resonate. Only two things are going to resonate—either more of the same thing, i.e. more disease, more heroin--- **or the exact opposite.**

In other words, how do you make a pathological lute string STOP vibrating its pathology, with resonance medicine? With the anti-note, with the opposite that is the same. With the specific corresponding opposite vibrational wavelength note of health. The only thing that has the force to cancel, through resonance, the trajectory of a pathology, is the other side of the same coin.

The specific corresponding note of health—what I usually call the virtue—is what destabilizes the system by introducing the experience of paradox. Head heads heads heads---always has been always will be—inevitable—suddenly the appearance of the possibility of tails; the *experience* of tails—Huh!?!—all possibility opens again—and that’s what I call the art of confoundry. It is a subtle art. One must ask, what kind of migraine is this? What kind of heroin addict is this? And this you have been trained to do.

So, step one, controlled destabilization of the system through the introduction of paradox. Our aim is to create an opening into a larger context, and this is what paradox forces; this is what Zen koans are for, is to force a person out of the box that they are in and bust up into a larger context, by confrontation with two things that *will not* fit together in the same box but yet do seem to co-exist—and boom! There goes the box...

This is what happens for instance when we give a yin tonic to a person who hasn’t rested in years and suddenly they are resting, but not because we forced them to—we didn’t give them a sedative drug. We introduced the note of yin where that note was no longer sounding, and where in fact the note of yinlessness was loudly sounding.

As practitioner we are putting it right in their face that reality includes more than they’ve reckoned in their picture and suddenly the whole worldview comes flying apart, momentum is canceled, stasis is broken, and they go WHAT!?

And they then are free, free to make a choice to rest, free to make the obvious choice, the natural choice, whatever that may be--- the choice which is obvious and natural now, but which was not obvious before, when reckoning from the small deterministic statistical box.

What’s most important is, we bring the person into a place where they are free to choose what is natural for themselves in every moment, in the context of the universe as a whole. Health: a state of freedom in which we are free to choose the obvious and natural.

Thus our object is not to give the other person’s body messages like, You need to rest. Our mandate is to give the person’s body a message of a possibility of rest where that possibility seemed incomprehensible, such that the suggestion throws a monkey wrench into the system, stops the trajectory, allows the person to come back into freedom right now and say “What am I doing? What do I truly need?” And respond in the moment freely. Rest, then, is what naturally happens, if rest is what is needed. That’s a whole other way of practicing than “Here, let me tell you what to do.”

This brings me to the one last point I need to make before I summarize and offer congratulations—and that is the all-important issue of dosage. In a resonance medicine, the most important thing is the diagnostic discernment of what is the note, what are the points or formulas needed; and the second most important thing is dosage. Dosage is really difficult to teach; it's an incredibly subtle art—because it is the art of partnership with the client. You cannot evoke freedom by force.

Western medicine clearly doses on the level of “Here, let me tell you what to do, and let me do it for you.” There are times when this is a very good idea. And there are even times when Chinese medicine is used this way—a formula is given or a protocol is done which is basically using resonance medicine, vibrational medicine, but because the herbal dosage is high or the needling technique is forceful and deliberate with very strong de qi, there is still a quality of taking over for the body, and telling it what to do. I call it Mighty Mouse syndrome—Here I Come To Save the DAY!

And it works, it definitely works; you will see results. But there is a higher work, at a lower dosage, and this dosage is **different** for each client—it is whatever dosage energetically matches and meets the client, engaging them as an equal. It is a dosage that is strong enough to deliver a clear and robust message, but not so strong as to take over for the client and thus induce passivity—(or rebellion).

When I speak of dosage, I want to be clear: I am not only speaking about herbs. There is dosage in needling also. We contact the qi of the client, and we deliver a message to the system. Is it being delivered with a thunderbolt like Thor, or whispered like the Good Fairy saying, “Have you ever considered this?”

For any given client on any given day, for any given point, what is the right dosage for needling, for delivering a message to destabilize a trajectory without creating a new trajectory? What is the dosage that will evoke freedom?

THERE IS NO WAY FOR THE PRACTITIONER TO DETECT THIS unless she is already in that moment of freedom, **and** fully present connecting in partnership with the client. Only in the now is there the time or the space and the perception for such an assessment. The art of dosage is the art of partnership and possibility, and it is exactly what the new practitioner can cultivate, as a doorway into practicing at the highest level, the level of evoking freedom as the foundation of health.

In or out of the treatment room, this is a choice we face every time we come across a situation that we wish to change. Shall I go head to head with the prevailing momentum and see if I can fight it and win? Shall I be the Aikido master, meeting the present situation fully in the moment, and make a small elegant intervention that shifts the prevailing momentum into a trajectory that better suits my purposes? Like, for instance, not getting clobbered?

Or can I take it one step further and be the healer, introducing into situations locked in discord the pure note of a forgotten virtue, so that the situation is forced to open beyond the bounded field of its previous scope, and consider the choices available in a greater context, the context of the unbounded field, chaos, the implicate order of Tao?

There's a critical mass to be reached—a quotient of freedom that awaits clients—practitioners—communities—countries and nations—who are living more and more from a place beyond expectation, a place of freedom to choose what is natural and obvious in the context that we all share, the context of all creation.

And fostering this freedom is what you have chosen to do for a living! I can't think of anything better to do, in or out of the treatment room. This is noble work. It is what the world needs most; it always has been, and always will be.

So next time you're in the tx room and you don't know what to do, flip a coin, and consider yourself truly blessed that there are no answers to your questions outside of the present moment. And then—do something unexpected.

Congratulations you guys. You will be great. You are what the universe has been waiting for.

Thank you.