



Reprinted with Permission
 © Robert Duggan, Tai Sophia Institute
 1997 Summer Issue of Meridians Magazine

HEALING FOR THE SAKE OF EVERYONE

Many people realize that for the sake of others they are willing to make changes they would not make for their own sake.

BY ROBERT M. DUGGAN

The chief executive of a corporation in a highly competitive industry in Washington State is an acupuncture patient and a student in TAI's SOPHIA program (School of Philosophy and Healing in Action). Recently he told me about a meeting, crucial to the future of his company, where he dared to start the meeting by asking the eight executives gathered around the table to spend a half hour reading a list of the company's employees, more than a hundred names, and to add whatever they knew about each employee's family—children, grandparents, spouses.

At the end of the exercise, an accountant-type at the table added up all the names mentioned and reported that at least 648 people would be affected by the decisions made at the meeting. My patient said that throughout the day, if the meeting got into a difficult space—the space between small-minded, short-term solutions and bigger-minded, longer-term solutions—then someone at the table would mention one of the grandchildren and say,

“What should we do for her sake?”

One of the teachings in the SOPHIA program is that we consider making our decisions in a way that honors our parents' parents and serves our children's children. This is a native American tradition and also a way taught in most of the world's ancient traditions. It is refreshing to take this wider perspective on the decisions and actions we craft each day, especially in our culture so dominated by advertising and actions based on impulse, moods, and emotions, and where we so often hear the phrase, “I did it because I felt like it.” Ancient cultures had little choice. Because survival was at stake, everyone was aware of the importance of service to each other.

I once treated a woman troubled with repeated headaches who worked in a very creative, highly stressful position. Acupuncture helped alleviate her pain and helped her to continue functioning in difficult circumstances. Yet she delayed making shifts in her life-style that would re-

move sources of her distress.

One day the woman's dog got sick. She took the dog to a wise veterinarian who at first glance thought the dog was being abused. After he talked to her for a while, however, the veterinarian realized that when the woman was sick, the dog stayed very close to her, and, it seemed, absorbed some of the pain of the headache. When the veterinarian hinted that the woman's headache might be the source of her pet's pain, she made life-style changes and never again had a headache.

Over the years I have asked many patients, “If you were feeling better, whom would it serve?” Often the question is a shock. Folks realize that for the sake of others they are willing to make changes they would not make for their own sake. So I offer my patients this possibility: When considering our personal well-being, our relationships with friends and relatives, our work in a business or corporation—at the moment of decision, the appropriate question might not be “What do I feel



Photo by Carol Cathcart

like doing?" or "What would make me happy?" It may be that genuine happiness comes from asking other questions: "What action in this moment will honor my parents' parents—all of the generations that have gone before?" And equally important, "What action would best serve not only my children, but their children and their children's children, so that I act in the biggest mind possible?"

I remember a young practitioner in a study group years ago asking, "What would happen if I took seriously

If you were feeling better, whom would it serve?

the concept of the Tao—of Oneness—in the treatment room?" She paused, thinking, and then spoke as if suddenly enlightened: "It would mean that I wouldn't see the patient and me as

separate, but as part of the Oneness. And I'd see us there for the sake of *everyone*—for the Oneness."

My promise to my patients is that as I treat them I will call them to the biggest possible mind, to the biggest possible vision of service. Over the 25 years of my practice, I've found that pain and suffering held in the context of service is vastly different from pain and suffering held as a personal problem.

That is also the promise of the Traditional Acupuncture Institute—to call all who study

here to a larger vision of life, and in so doing call other institutions to the service of future generations.

Robert M. Duggan, M.Ac.(UK), Dipl.Ac.(NCCA), teaches and practices acupuncture in Columbia, Maryland. Cofounder and president of the Traditional Acupuncture Institute, he serves as chairman of the Maryland State Board of Acupuncture.