

The Art of Greatness: Reflections on Achieving TCM Mastery

The greatness of a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioner is not quantifiable, but must be expressed like all other inexplicable human phenomena - through art. Just as the art of TCM has been documented with pictographs in the Chinese language, this author will attempt to verbally illustrate the elusive “greatness” of TCM practitioners.

Qualities of a “Great” TCM Practitioner

Instead of attempting to list and describe all the potential qualities of a great practitioner, this author will focus on only a few characteristics that, if absent, would demote a “great” practitioner to a simply “good” one.

*“The master observes the world,
But trusts her inner vision.
She allows things to come and go.
Her heart is as open as the sky.”*

They have their own style. Great practitioners of TCM have a certain “je ne sais quoi” - an idiosyncratic quality that defies explanation and language itself. This trait in great practitioners can be spotted when they make an irreplicable style that attracts imitators. Self-awareness combined with a trust of self transforms an average practitioner into a creative artist that is intellectually self-reliant. Great TCM practitioners invent new ways of thinking and synergizing old information to make it better than it was before. As modern pioneers in our field, they will often be described as specialists and leaders. Achieving self-confidence and self-knowledge allows them the confidence to focus on what makes them feel the most passionate. After achieving mastery by general study, they one day will transition their focus to their individually distinctive gifts. This is what allows them to truly shine in their chosen niche.

*The master doesn't talk, she acts.
When her work is done,
The people say “Amazing,
We did it, all by ourselves.”*

They are lifelong learners and teachers. Great practitioners of TCM are generous in their endowment of knowledge on colleagues and students and, yet, ironically, they never profess to know everything about any subject. Those who are constantly in a state of learning are bound to become masters someday as they are in a constant state of openness and growth which propels them to new levels of advancement. Additionally, a great practitioner must be excellent at not only absorbing and retaining new information, but also regurgitating that information in a

way that can be easily digested by their most common students - their patients! The majority of healing in TCM happens when the practitioner helps the patient to learn (or remember), how to feel, think and act in healthful ways to restore their organ systems to balance. A great practitioner will be one that catalyzes the growth of their students by empowering them with the knowledge of their own inner wisdom.

*“The master doesn’t seek fulfillment.
Not seeking, not expecting,
She is present, and can welcome all things.”*

They have presence. At times, the very presence of a great practitioner has in itself a healing quality. When you give an individual your attention, you are giving them the greatest gift of all - an acknowledgement of their inherent existential worthiness. A truly great practitioner gives love in every interaction by making their treatments a working meditation on each word and feeling of their patient. This allows them to notice subtle signs or symptoms that an average practitioner would overlook. Observation is one of the most underrated skills of a great TCM practitioner because as a society we are afflicted with chronic partial attention. When someone really notices and is present with a patient, the powerful act could literally bring one to tears as many go through life being unacknowledged by others. Presence is a state of being that is only achieved through years of meditative practices.

*“The master sees things as they are,
Without trying to control them.
She lets them go their own way,
And resides at the center of the circle.”*

They are detached from results. A great practitioner, by acknowledging their worth, seeks to participate in an equal exchange of energy during a treatment transaction, but does not seek self-aggrandizement. Everyone naturally enjoys a little approval and recognition from time to time, but a truly great practitioner is primarily focused on doing their best to be of service to others. Just as the Tao Te Ching mentions, it’s only when the master realizes their own insignificance that they can access true power to facilitate the health of their patients. While not all great practitioners need to be spiritual or religious to have this humbling perspective, the acknowledgement of the healing skill as an inherent power of all human beings is sufficient. The patient is the true healer, therefore a great practitioner does not insert their own desires into the healing experience. Combined with a mindful presence, the full acceptance of what is, rather than what could be, gives the patient and the practitioner the freedom to express their best healing ability. After all, sometimes even the desire for a patient to improve can be detrimental if the result is ultimately due to many circumstances outside of the practitioner's control. The great TCM practitioner does their work and then lets it go. This perspective is one of great compassion because the practitioner and patient benefit alike from the expansive energy of non-judgment or total acceptance of what is and what will be.

Cultivating Individual Greatness as a Student of TCM

In summary, a great TCM practitioner is one that has stopped seeking to be great and is fully dedicated to service to others. In order to achieve greatness, focus on cultivating your own health and happiness. Those who seek advice from a TCM practitioner will learn best from model behavior. While it may seem counterintuitive, one must simultaneously focus on the cultivation of their own mind, body, and spirit to be able to truly transcend even the desire to be well-regarded. As mysterious as it may seem, this paradox is what it means to walk the middle way of balance as a great TCM practitioner.

References:

Laozi, and Stephen Mitchell. Tao Te Ching: a New English Version. HarperCollins, 2006.

About the Author (Extracurriculars and Personal Interests)

Nicolette Natrin is a Doctor of Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine candidate at Pacific College of Science and Health in San Diego. By day, she works in downtown San Diego as a Marketing Operations Manager for an industry-leading secondary market hedge advisory firm, Mortgage Capital Trading.

Ms. Natrin has been instrumental in the revision and development of the foundational processes of the Pacific College San Diego Student Council since joining as Secretary in August 2017. She is currently servicing her second term as Council President, boasting over 300 hours (and counting!) of volunteer work in the service of Pacific College's student community. Aside from school and work, Ms. Natrin's primary interests include self-development, reading, writing, playing guitar, yoga, and Eastern philosophy.

Ms. Natrin earned her B.A. in English literature and literary theory from Hunter College of the City Universities of New York. Her concentration was in spoken word poetry accompanied by improvisational Jazz musicians.

"I am becoming a Doctor of Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine so I can spread the digital word to make Traditional Chinese Medical health practices as integrated into our psyches as Western medicine. I'm excited to bring my marketing skills and passion for self-improvement to the creation of Om Kinetics - the first community center made for lovers of holistic health, practical education, and new age spirituality. " - Nicolette Natrin, Founder and CEO of Om Kinetics