

Asian Bodywork Therapy

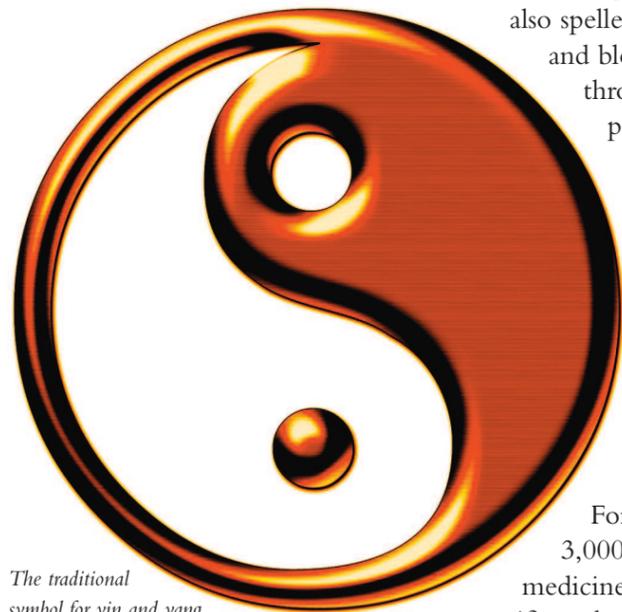
By Cindy Banker



What is Asian Bodywork Therapy (ABT)? For many patients, it is much more than some sort of Eastern massage technique – but a comprehensive, therapeutic model that can make the difference between living a life of pain and living life as intended. Although ABT involves hands-on bodywork, it is a world apart from typical Western massage therapy. For one thing, ABT is able to address the dynamic of a person’s behavior and how it affects the whole body.

Most ABT practitioners look at each patient’s diet, lifestyle, and emotional well-being. The goal is not just to make patients feel better; it is to educate and collaborate to help people learn ways to create their own good health for the rest of their lives.

ABT is based on the same principles as acupuncture and other forms of Eastern or traditional Oriental medicine; however, it does not involve the use of needles. One of the basic principles of Eastern medicine is that the body consists of five essential substances, which include



The traditional symbol for yin and yang.

blood and energy, called “Qi,” also spelled “chi.” The Qi and blood both flow through specific pathways or meridians.

Disease occurs when one or more of these meridians are blocked and energy stagnates within the body.

For more than 3,000 years, Chinese medicine has involved specific techniques to stimulate Qi and affect these energy channels, thereby balancing bodily functions and banishing disease. These techniques are currently gaining greater acceptance among Western universities and practitioners.

Traditional Oriental medicine has been well documented in treating chronic conditions such as pain and addiction. It is gaining recognition both as a useful alternative or helpful adjunct to Western medicine. It has proven particularly helpful when Western medicine is unable to detect a specific problem and there is not a treatment strategy to be recommended, such as surgery or drugs.

Usually the first session of ABT includes an initial consultation in which the practitioner takes time to get to know the patient. All ABT practitioners use some form of the Chinese medicine’s four examina-

To locate a certified practitioner in Asian Bodywork Therapy: The National Certification Commission for Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) www.nccaom.org

tions. This usually includes taking their patient’s radial pulse. Oriental medicine differentiates nine different locations and 28 specific qualities which can be palpated in the person’s pulse. These can be used to assess the Qi, blood, and fluids, and the condition of 12 internal storage centers. These 12 are usually known by the names of their predominant internal organ such as the kidney or the lung. Observation often includes looking at the patient’s complexion, tongue, eyes, skin, and hair.

Once the patient and the practitioner decide on a plan of action, the healing process begins. There are at least 13 specific modalities included in ABT. For most of them, the patient remains fully clothed in loose-fitting, cotton clothing. Each hands-on treatment is unique to the individual and their condition at the time of treatment. After the hands-on treatment, the practitioner might also prescribe various lifestyle adjustments including specific breathing or physical exercises, dietary changes, or a change in mentality.

One of the most recognized representations in Chinese medicine is the yin/yang symbol. In a balanced state, both the dark (yin) and the light (yang) are in harmony. The same is true with the human body. The five ele-

ments in traditional Oriental medicine are used to categorize almost everything from the seasons in the year to the organs in the body. Five Element Shiatsu is one form of ABT which uses a very high level of Chinese medical theory.

When working with patients, the ABT practitioner is able to use these organizing principles to see a bigger picture in the patient’s chief complaint. For example, in Chinese medicine, practitioners believe that cold can adversely affect the lungs. This describes the actual organ of the lung as well as a whole spectrum of resonance emanating from it. Breathing cold air while running outside is an obvious factor, but so is the nature of a viral cold invading the lungs. The runny nose the patient complains of may be considered a specific symptom. Clear, copious mucus is indicative of an excess of this cold. This type of problem can be exacerbated by having too much cold food such as orange juice and ice cream. If it is fall going into winter, a practitioner might recommend a patient eat warm soups or root vegetables in order to warm the stomach and nourish the lungs. In that way, the body can be better prepared to ward off cold and be in tune with the changing season. This approach to maintaining good health can help the patient avoid getting sick and prevent the need for antibiotics or more invasive therapies.

Much of Chinese medicine is based on common-sense observations as well as clinical experience. Traditional Oriental medicine in general and Asian Bodywork Therapy in particular are much more than the remnants of some kind of folk medicine. The modern practice of these ancient traditions has been carefully preserved and evolved over time. Now ABT is a new profession which is increasingly available in the U.S. The focus of creating health and teaching patients how to maintain health remains an area where Western medical science continues to need the most help. Chinese medicine’s complex system of diagnosing and balancing the Qi, blood, and fluids may be likened to getting your new television calibrated or your old computer realigned. As many people are finding out for themselves, the results are not only helpful, but they are often life-changing.

Cindy Banker, a NCCAOM-certified ABT practitioner based out of Brookline, has been practicing ABT professionally for over 25 years. In her practice she implements the Five Element Shiatsu form. With an extensive background in traditional Chinese medicine as well, Banker has over 20 years of professional teaching in the career of ABT and Chinese medicine.

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