

The Secret Rhyme on Needling ‘Barriers Within’



(针内障秘歌)

内障由来十八般，精医明哲用心看，

The barriers we need to surmount within

Fall into eighteen kinds.

A shrewd physician will understand their subtleties

And apply his heart keenly to them.

分明一一知形状，下手行针自入玄。

If you clearly identify these barriers, one by one

And understand their form and function,

Then, as you silently enter in the needle...

You, yourself, may be quietened and subdued.

察他冷热虚和实，多惊先服镇心丸，

Scrutinise, each by each, as to cold or heat –

Whether each symptom may be empty or full.

More often than not the patient is frightened

And you must dose them the ‘heart guardian’ pill.

弱翳细针粗拔老，针形不可一般般。

With hidden scars, the slim needle

Roughly roots out the old.

The needle’s form is not of one kind –

But can appear in many guises.

病虚新瘥怀妊月，针后应知将息难，

If the patient is weak, or recently recovering from illness

Or during their monthly period, or pregnant,

Then, after needling, they ought to understand
The need for rest to deal with this.

不雨不风兼吉日，清斋三日在针前。

Not in rain, nor in storm –
At the same time, make it on an auspicious day,
Fast and cleanse the body, three days,
Then you can come to apply the needle.

To rest in contentment, *an* 安,
is the epitome of Taoist practice

安心定志存真气，念佛亲姻莫杂喧，
Settle the mind, apply the thinking,
To cherish and care for the true qi.
Do not take thought for family or those close to you,
Nor let it stray to clamour or noise.

患者向明盘膝坐，医师全要静心田。

A settled heart and
mind is primary

The patient should face the light,
With their knees crossed or sitting –
The doctor should put the whole attention on being still
And clear the territory of the heart.

有血莫惊须住手，裹封如旧勿频看，

If the point bleeds, do not frighten them –
But stay your hand.
Bind it up until it returns to as it was,
Do not incessantly comment on it.

若然头痛不能忍，热茶和服草乌烟。

If they have a headache,
Which becomes unendurable,
Then tell them to drink hot tea
With pan-fried aconite root.

七日解封方视物，花生水动莫开言，

Seven days, something is released...
Then something is seen.
A flower born, the water ripples...
It is nothing words can express.

还睛圆散坚心服，百日冰轮彻九渊。
 Again the eyes, round, softened...
 The solid heart arrives and is taken.
 A hundred days and an icy moon
 Shines out in the deeps...

Note to The Secret Rhyme on Needling 'Barriers Within'

A rare treasure. This is Yang Jizhou's own great poem. I have provided one tentative translation – but the lines are so compacted, other views are possible. He expresses his thoughts in brief couplets on the 'inner barriers' to surmount when needling. The necessity is to have a quiet countenance and reverential attitude.

Obviously a successful treatment results in a deeply moral and meaningful transformation in the person. Perhaps the bright, cold moon signifies the dawning of a spiritual truth – felt deep in the heart. The cold truth of one's individual nature? The moon has often been used in Chinese poetry – and has a pivotal role in internal alchemy. It provides gentle illumination. Serenity and calm are shown in the line: 'a hundred days and an icy moon, shines out in the deeps', suggesting some inner revelation, brightening our being.

I guess that the icy moon restores our identity – just as acupuncture boosts immunity: after all it is only our immunity which maintains the boundary with our world, the not-me. In this sense acupuncture reclaims our health, our individual being, an icy moon in the heavens.

Which are the 18 barriers? I have no real idea. Maybe because there are 12 verses in all, with 24 couplets. In this case, then, the opening two verses are introductory, which leaves ten. The final two count as one. This makes nine verses, 18 line-couplets (barriers), 18 obstacles to overcome.

Else it could just be that there are 18 hurdles to watch and overcome: cold and heat, empty or full, the patient frightened, the need to rest if weak, or recently recovered from illness, or pregnant, or during their monthly period, or not in rain, and not in storm, on an auspicious day, then fast and cleanse the body, settle the mind and apply the thinking, do not think of family or near ones, do not be disturbed by noise, the patient sitting facing the light, the doctor still, if the point bleeds keep calm, and lastly if they have a headache take medicine.

But whatever the barriers are, the point is that, in a very Confucian manner, a reverential message of calm and quiet transformation pervades the poem. The message of the quiet heart in the practitioner echoes throughout the Neijing, as well as the other poems and rhymes in this collection. If we 'rest in excellence'

(a phrase from the Daxue or Confucian first text, the *Great Learning*) we can surmount the 'barriers within' which we all find in our way – sooner or later – in practice.

