

Tending the Wind – Chapter 18
Intuition
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“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.” – Albert Einstein

Merriam-Webster gives the following information regarding intuition. Its roots come from the Latin term for *the act of contemplation*. It is variably defined as *quick and ready insight, immediate apprehension or cognition, and the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference*.

Rational and analytical thought, on the other hand, is indirect knowledge gained by comparing bits of acquired information with something else (past experiences, scientific models, culturally accepted norms) to come to a conclusion. It examines specific parts in a pre-determined way, while intuitive insight spontaneously emerges from flowing streams of interconnected influences that come together to form a whole impression. The concept of intuition as direct knowledge is illustrated by its Chinese characters: zhí-jué. Zhí (ten eyes saw no concealment) means *straight, vertical, or direct*. Jué (see and learn) means *to perceive, to feel, or the noun sense*.

In real life intuition and analysis are not readily separated, nor are they in opposition. Someone may have an insight about something but not know why, and follow up with the tools of analysis to cross-reference and verify their intuition. Conversely, rational thought may suggest a correct course of action, but someone may hesitate to act until “feeling” that it’s correct (perhaps waiting for a sense of the right combination of influences to reach their awareness). As people gain more experience in a particular area, their intuitive and analytical processes tend to merge. People who are experts in their field often readily experience an easy interplay between the two, able to call forth at once a number of seemingly disparate influences and pieces of information that somehow manage to form a beautifully seamless and impeccably logical whole. Those who invite inspiration from the heart of things-as-they-are tend to discover more brilliant concepts than those who demand a particular set of responses from things probed with set guidelines and expectations. The key is to harbor a contemplative mind.

Contemplation is defined as *thoughtful observation or study, an act of considering with attention, the act of regarding steadily, or spiritual concentration/meditation*. To the extent that contemplation is performed with an open mind, insight will be free of judgments...but it’s more involved than that.

Direct knowledge does not have to come from contemplation. All living things have a direct understanding of gravity, even if they don’t have a name for it or a means to discuss its attributes. Its effects are directly experienced, influencing the way things grow, move and change. It transforms things. And the grand scale of its physical and physiologic influence, which carries far beyond a single individual, means it doesn’t take any meditation to acknowledge its presence. It’s the smaller influences that require a more delicate sensibility to recognize, and more refined tools to analyze. On a relatively small scale, measurements become impossible because the very tools used to make those measurements cause perturbations in the object or system being studied. As much as science tries to be objective, there are always limitations and alterations presented by the observer. The observer causes transformation. Theorists talk about the interface between the observer and the observed as the only real “thing” that can be perceived. And since perception itself requires transformation (e.g. light waves converted by the retina to chemical signals in the eye), perhaps this interface is better thought of as a field of transformation. And perhaps direct knowledge – intuition – is simply a matter of being willing to participate in mutual transformation. A contemplative mind helps in this

regard because it creates a space for transformation to occur. Repeated experience also helps as the observer gains a feeling for how that process naturally flows.

So how does all of this relate to holistic veterinary medicine? Holistic therapy requires having a feeling for the patient as a unique individual. In the clinic setting this begins with things like the homeopathic interview and Chinese tongue and pulse evaluation. These are analytical tools; the information gathered is fed into the homeopathic repertory or the manual of tongue and pulse evaluation to come up with a conclusion. But these tools are far from being purely objective. The practitioner chooses which questions to ask (even if the choice is to use the same questionnaire provided by a master homeopath for every interview), and how to interpret the tapestry of the tongue and pulse (narrowing their complexities into a few key words). With contemplative insight, he or she might suddenly come up with just the right question to ask, making the difference between a good remedy and a great one. Or something about the pulse just feels like acupuncture should focus on one organ over another, even though disharmony in either could have caused the current complaint. And certainly insight can make the difference between “cookbook” acupuncture versus a symphony of points that promote deep healing.

Introducing intuition into the clinic setting, however, is tricky business. Veterinarians spend a long time in the basic sciences before ever touching a medical text (let alone a living patient), and are deeply entrenched in the objective scientist’s mindset. “Mutual transformation” is not a phrase that crops up anywhere in the curriculum. More importantly, having a “standard of care” requires the absence of individual interpretation; the only valid information comes from objective blood tests and radiographs, the only treatment from drugs proven effective in double-blind studies. There is good reason for this, as it protects patients from hucksters and snake oil. But it also makes practitioners afraid to trust and utilize their own instincts. Clients seeking holistic care for their animals tend to be more open to intuition as a valid component of therapy, and as there are no direct scientific tests for things like damp heat in the triple heater it certainly helps to have intuition as an aid. If intuition is employed to a high degree, the practitioner must have informed consent from the client, and not ignore the benefits of conventional means.

The practitioner who is serious about developing their intuition can take any number of classes on the subject, but in the end it is about personal transformation. What do I believe? Do my beliefs place limitations on the insights I might receive? Am I willing to change and consider other, seemingly outrageous, possibilities? Am I willing to let my patients’ qì flow through me in a deep and profound way, causing transformation within me as I glean perceptive insight into them? Is it safe or must there always be some subtle energy barrier? Must I, as many practitioners do, cleanse my aura after every patient? And how much of my insight is being influenced by the client? These may seem like silly questions, but they become important when discussing subtle energy fields and concepts like qì. (Even on an everyday level, how many of us change our behavior and our physiology based on subtle influences from those around us?)

The question of personal beliefs is a serious one, and can only be answered by each individual. Our beliefs influence everything we allow into ourselves and put out to the world. Changing a belief is the hardest thing to do. (Softening a belief can begin with the idea that you hold it as you would your child, with caring yet flexible support, rather than grasping onto it for dear life or keeping it frozen in time.) The question of personal protection is equally serious for anyone who has experienced that instant sensation of simultaneously being totally connected and yet totally vulnerable. One extraordinary second of connection and intuitive insight is followed in the next second by an instinctive desire to pull back after being so profoundly exposed. It helps in this regard to remember the lessons of the metal phase in Chinese medicine (Chapter 13). We have within us the ability to maintain the truth of our inner nature in any situation and through any transformation; the paradox is that this ability requires constant rhythmic exchange (breathing). Mindful breathing maintains the purity of the self while allowing the self to

shift in accordance with one's *dào* and in harmony with the *dào* of others. Even the body's protective skin layer depends on rhythmic exchange to stay healthy.

An even more interesting question is this: Is the proper goal of medical intuition to come up with answers, or is it better used to simply glean a sense of the patient's path at that particular moment? The expectation to receive an answer to a question is another obstacle to flexible insight. And as one's *dào* is ever-changing, a desire to come up with *the* right and final answer is unreasonable. Whatever aids are used, whether intuitive or analytical, the end result of therapy is subject to the unique mystery of the patient. If the practitioner is mindful of that mystery while palpating points and placing needles, treatment may not be curative but it will be harmonious. Perhaps how we get to the end is more important than the end itself. It determines who we are when we get there.